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FIVE LITTLE PLAYS

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BY

ALFRED SUTRO

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BRENTANO'S
NEW YORK
1914

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THE MAN IN THE STALLS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HECTOR ALLEN
ELIZABETH ALLEN (BETTY)
WALTER COZENS

This play was produced
at the Palace Theatre
on October 6, 1911

THE MAN IN THE STALLS

The sitting-room of a little flat in Shaftesbury Avenue. At back is a door leading to the dining-room—it is open, and the dinner-table is in full view of the audience. To the extreme right is another door, leading to the hall.

The place is pleasantly and prettily, though quite inexpensively, furnished. To the left, at angles with the distempered wall, is a baby-grand piano; the fireplace, in which a fire is burning merrily, is on the same side, full centre. To the right of the door leading to the dining-room is a small side-table, on which there is a tray with decanter and glasses; in front of this, a card-table, open, with two packs of cards on it, and chairs on each side. Another table, a round one, is in the centre of the room—to right and to left of it are comfortable armchairs. Against the right wall is a long sofa; above it hang a few good water-colours and engravings; on the piano and the table there are flowers. A general appearance of refinement and comfort pervades the room; no luxury, but evidence everywhere of good taste, and the countless feminine touches that make a room homelike and pleasant.

When the curtain rises, HECTOR ALLEN, *a youngish man of forty, with an attractive intellectual face, is seen standing by the dining-table in the inner room, draining his liqueur-glass, with* WALTER COZENS *to the right of him, lighting a cigarette.* WALTER *is a few years younger than his friend, moderately good-looking, with fine, curly brown hair and a splendid silky moustache. His morning-clothes are conspicuously well-cut—he is evidently something of a dandy;* HECTOR *wears a rather shabby dress-suit, his boots are awkward, and his tie ready-made.* BETTY, *a handsome woman of thirty, wearing a very pretty tea-gown, is talking to the maid at the back of the dining-room.*

HECTOR *puts down his glass and comes into the sitting-room, followed by* WALTER. HECTOR *is puffing at a short, stumpy little black cigar.*

HECTOR. [*Talking as he comes through, continuing the conversation—he walks to the fireplace and stands with his back to it.*] I tell you, if I'd known what it meant, I'd never have taken the job! Sounded so fine, to be reader of plays for the Duke's Theatre—adviser to the great Mr. Honeyswill! And then—when the old man said I was to go to all the first nights—why, I just chortled! "It's the first nights that show you the grip of the thing—that teach you most"—he said. Teach you! As though there were anything to learn! Oh my stars! I tell you, it's a dog's life!

WALTER. [*Sitting to left of the round table.*] I'd change places with you, sonny.

HECTOR. You would, eh? That's what they all say! Four new plays this week, my lad—one yesterday, one to-day—another to-morrow, and the night after! All day long I'm *reading* plays—and I spend my nights seeing 'em! D'you know I read about two thousand a year? Divide two thousand by three hundred and sixty five. A dog's life—that's what it is!

WALTER. Better than being a stockbroker's clerk—you believe *me!*

HECTOR. Is it? I wish *you* could have a turn at it, my bonny boy! *Your* hair'd go grey, like mine! And look here—what are the plays to-day? They're either so chock-full of intellect that they send you to sleep—or they reek of sentiment till you yearn for the smell of a cabbage!

WALTER. Well, you've the change, at any rate.

HECTOR. [*Snorting.*] Change? By Jove, give me a Punch and Judy show on the sands—or performing dogs! Plays—I'm sick of 'em! And look here—the one I'm off to to-night. It's adapted from the French—well, we know what *that* means. Husband, wife and mistress. Or wife, husband, lover. That's what a French play means. And you make it English, and pass the Censor, by putting the lady in a mackintosh, and dumping in a curate!

BETTY. [*Coming in, and closing the door leading to the dining-room.*] You ought to be going, Hector.

[*She stands listening for a moment, then goes through the other door into the hall.*

HECTOR. [*Disregarding her, too intent on his theme.*] And I tell you, of the two, I prefer the home-made stodge. I'm sick of the eternal triangle. They always do the same thing. Husband strikes attitudes —sometimes he strikes the lover. The lover never stands up to him—why shouldn't he? He would—in real life. [BETTY *comes back with his overcoat and muffler—she proceeds affectionately to wrap this round his neck, and helps him on with his coat, he talking all the time.*] He'd say, look here, you go to Hell. *That's* what he'd say—well, there you'd have a situation. But not one of the playwriting chaps dares do it. Why not, I ask you? There you'd have truth, something big. But no—they're afraid—think the public won't like it. The husband's got to down the lover —like a big tom-cat with a mouse—or the author'd have to sell one of his motor-cars! That's just the fact of it!

BETTY. [*Looking at the clock on the mantelpiece.*] Twenty-five past, Hector.

HECTOR. [*Cheerily.*] All right, my lass, I'm off. By-bye, Walter—keep the old woman company for a bit. Good-bye, sweetheart. [*He kisses her.*] Don't wait up. Now for the drama. Oh, the dog's life!

[*He goes.* BETTY *waits till the hall door has banged, then she sits on the elbow of* WALTER'S *chair, and rests her head on his shoulder.*

BETTY. [*Softly.*] Poor Hector!

WALTER. [*Uncomfortably.*] . . . Yes . . .

BETTY. Doesn't it make you feel dreadful when he talks like that? [*She kisses him; then puts her arms round his neck, draws his face to her, and kisses him again, on the cheek.*] Doesn't it?

[*She nestles contentedly closer to him.*

WALTER. [*Trying to edge away.*] Well, it does. Yes.

BETTY. [*Dreamily.*] I—like it.

WALTER. Betty!

BETTY. Yes, I like it. I don't know why. I suppose I'm frightfully wicked. Or the danger perhaps —I don't know.

WALTER. [*Making a futile effort to get up.*] Betty——

BETTY. [*Tightening her arms around him.*] Stop there, and don't move. How smooth your chin is—*his* scrapes. Why don't husbands shave better? Or is it that the forbidden chin is always smoother? Poor old Hector! If he could see us! He hasn't a suspicion. I think it's lovely—really, I do. He leaves us here together, night after night, and imagines you're teaching me bridge.

WALTER. [*Restlessly.*] So I am. Where are the cards?

BETTY. [*Caressing him.*] Silly, have you forgotten that this is Tuesday—Maggie's night out? She's gone—I told her she needn't wait to clear away.

We've arranged master's supper. Master! *You're* my master, aren't you?

WALTER. . . . I don't know what I am . . .

BETTY. Oh yes you do—you're my boy. Whom I love. There. [*She kisses him again, full on the lips.*] That was a nice one, wasn't it? Poor old Hector, sitting in his stall—thinks he's so wonderful, knows such a lot! Yes, Maggie's out—with *her* young man, I suppose. The world's full of women, with their young men—and husbands sitting in the stalls. . . . And I suppose that's how it always has been, and always will be.

WALTER. [*Shifting uneasily.*] Don't, Betty—I don't like it. I mean, he has such confidence in us.

BETTY. Of course he has. And quite rightly. Aren't you his oldest friend?

WALTER. [*With something of a groan.*] I've known him since I was seven.

BETTY. The first man he introduced me to—his best man at the wedding—do you remember coming to see us during the honeymoon? I liked you *then.*

WALTER. [*Really shocked.*] Betty!

BETTY. I did. You had a way of squeezing my hand. . . . And then when we came back here. You know it didn't take me long to discover——

WALTER. [*Protesting.*] I scarcely saw you the first two or three years!

BETTY. No—you were afraid. Oh I thought you so silly! [*He suddenly contrives to release himself—gets up, and moves to the card-table.*] Why, what's the matter?

WALTER. [*At the table, with his back to her.*] I hate hearing you talk like this.

BETTY. Silly boy! [*She rises, and goes to him; he has taken a cigarette out of the box on the table, and stands there, with his head bent, tapping the cigarette against his hand.*] Women only talk "like this," as you call it, to their lovers. They talk "like that" to their husbands—and that's why the husbands never know. That's why the husbands are always sitting in the stalls, looking on. [*She puts her arms round him again.*] Looking and not seeing.

[*She approaches her lips to his—he almost fretfully unclasps her arms.*

WALTER. Betty—I want to say a—serious word . . .

BETTY. [*Looking fondly at him.*] Well, isn't what *I'm* saying serious?

WALTER. I'm thirty-eight.

BETTY. Yes. I'm only thirty. But I'm not complaining.

WALTER. Has it ever occurred to you——

[*He stops.*

BETTY. What?

[WALTER *looks at her—tries to speak, but cannot—then he breaks away, goes across the room to the fireplace and stands for a moment looking into the fire. She has remained where she was, her eyes following him wonderingly. Suddenly he stamps his foot violently.*

WALTER. Damn it! DAMN it!

BETTY. [*Moving towards him in alarm.*] What's the matter?

WALTER. [*With a swift turn towards her.*] I'm going to get married.

BETTY. [*Stonily, stopping by the round table.*] You . . .

WALTER. [*Savagely.*] Going to get married, yes. Married, married!

[*She stands there and doesn't stir—doesn't speak or try to speak; merely stands there, and looks at him, giving no sign. Her silence irritates him; he becomes more and more violent, as though to give himself courage.*

WALTER. You're wonderful, you women—you really are. Always contrive to make us seem brutes, or cowards! I've wanted to tell you this a dozen times—I've not had the pluck. Well, to-day I must. Must, do you hear that? . . . Oh, for Heaven's sake, say something.

BETTY. [*Still staring helplessly at him.*] You . . .

WALTER. [*Feverishly.*] Yes, I, I! Now it's out, at least—it's spoken! I mean to get married, like other men—fooled, too, I dare say, like the others—at least I deserve it! But I'm tired, I tell you—tired——

BETTY. Of me?

WALTER. Tired of the life I lead—the beastly, empty rooms—the meals at the Club. And I'm thirty-eight—it's now or never.

BETTY. [*Slowly.*] And how about—me?

WALTER. You?

BETTY. [*Passionately.*] Yes. Me. Me!

WALTER. You didn't think this would last for ever?

BETTY. [*Nodding her head.*] I did—yes—I did. Why shouldn't it?

WALTER. [*Working himself into a fury again.*] Why? You ask that? Why? Oh yes, it's all right for *you*—you've your home and your husband—I'm there as an—annexe. To be telephoned to, when I'm wanted, at your beck and call, throw over everything, come when you whistle And it's not only that—I tell you it makes me feel—horrid. After all, he's my—friend.

BETTY. He has been that always. You didn't feel—horrid—before. . . . Who is she?

WALTER. [*Shortly, as he turns back to the fire.*] That doesn't matter.

BETTY. Yes, it does. Who?

WALTER. [*Fretfully.*] Oh, why should we——

BETTY. I want to know—I'm *entitled* to know.

WALTER. [*Still with his back to her.*] Mary Gillingham.

BETTY. Mary Gillingham!

WALTER. [*Firmly, swinging round to her.*] Yes.

BETTY. That child, that chit of a girl!

WALTER. She's twenty-three.

BETTY. Whom I introduced you to—my own friend?

WALTER. [*Grumbling.*] What *has* that to do with

it? And besides . . . [*He suddenly changes his tone, noticing how calm she has become—he takes a step towards her, and stands by her side, at the back of the table; his voice becomes gentle and affectionate.*] But I say, really, you're taking it awfully well—pluckily. I knew you would—I knew I was an ass to be so—afraid. . . . And look here, we'll always be pals—the very best of pals. I'll . . . never forget—never. You may be quite sure . . . of that. I want to get married—I do—have a home of my own, and so forth—but you'll still be—just the one woman I really have loved—the one woman in my life—to whom I owe—everything.

BETTY. [*With a mirthless laugh.*] Do you tell all that—to Mary Gillingham?

WALTER. [*Pettishly, as he moves away.*] Do I—don't be so absurd.

BETTY. You tell *her* she is the only *girl* you have loved.

WALTER. [*Moving back to the fire, with his back to her.*] I tell her—I tell her—what does it matter what I tell her? And one girl or another—she or some one else——

BETTY. But you haven't answered my question—what's to become of me?

WALTER. [*Angrily, facing her.*] Become of you! Don't talk such nonsense. Because it is—really it is. You'll be as you were. And Hector's a splendid chap—and after all we've been frightfully wrong—treating him infernally badly—despicably. Oh yes, we have

—and you know it. Lord, there've been nights when I have—but never mind that—that's all over! In future we can look him in the face without feeling guilty—we can——

BETTY. [*Quietly.*] *You* can.

WALTER. What do you mean?

BETTY. *You* can, because of this girl. Oh, I know, of course! You'll come here three or four times—then you'll drop off—you'll feel I'm not quite the woman you want your wife to know.

WALTER. [*With genuine feeling, as he impulsively steps towards her.*] Betty, Betty, what sort of cad do you take me for? What sort of cad, or bounder? Haven't I told you I'd never forget—never? And you think you'll pass out of my life—that I *want* you to? Why, good Heaven, I'll be your best friend as long as I live. Friend—yes—what I always should have been—meant to be! And Hector. Why, Betty, I tell you, merely talking to-night, as I've done, has made me feel—different—sort of—lifted—a load. Because I've always had it—somewhere deep down in me—when I've thought of—him.

BETTY. [*Calmly.*] Liar.

WALTER. [*Falling back.*] Betty!

BETTY. Liar—yes. Why these stupid, silly lies? "Always, deep down in me!" Where was it, this beautiful feeling, when you got me to go to your rooms?

WALTER. [*Harshly.*] We needn't——

BETTY. I liked you—I've said that—I liked you

from the first. But I was straight enough. Liked you, of course—but I had no idea, not the slightest. . . . Thought it fun to play the fool, flirt just a bit. But it was you, you, *you* who——

WALTER. [*Breaking in sulkily and stamping his foot.*] Never mind about who it was.

BETTY. [*Passionately.*] Never mind! You dare!

WALTER. [*Doggedly.*] Yes—I dare. And look here—since you force me to it—that's all rot—yes, it is—just rot. Just as you like it now, hearing Hector ask me to stop with you, and kissing me the moment his back is turned—so you met me halfway, and more than halfway.

BETTY. You cur!

WALTER. That's what a woman always says, when a man speaks the truth. Because it *is* the truth—and you know it. "The way I squeezed your hand!" D'you think I *meant* to squeeze it—in a way! Why, as there's a Heaven above me, you were as sacred to me—as my own sister!

BETTY. [*Quietly, as she sits, to right of the table.*] What I'm wondering is—you see, you're the only lover I've had—what I wonder is, when a man breaks off, tells a woman he's tired of her, wants to get married—does he *always* abuse the woman——

WALTER. [*Sulkily.*] I haven't——

BETTY. Degrade, and throw mud on, the love she has had for him?

WALTER. [*With a bitter shrug.*] Love——

BETTY. [*Passionately, as she springs to her feet.*]

Love, love, yes, you—cruel man! Love, what else? I adore you, don't you know that? Live for you! would give up everything in the world—everything, everything! And Walter, Walter! If it's only *that*—that you want a home—well, let's go off together. He'll divorce us—we can get married. Don't go away, and leave me here, alone with him! I couldn't stand it—Walter, I couldn't, I couldn't!

[*She goes eagerly to him, flings her arms round his neck, and a dry sob bursts from her.*

WALTER. [*Very gently.*] Betty, Betty, you've been so brave . . . Betty, dear, the horrid things I've said were only to make you angry, to make you feel what a brute I was, how well you're rid of me. Oh, I'm not proud of myself! But look here, we must be sensible—we must, really. . . . You know, if you were divorced—if I were the co-respondent in a divorce case—I'd lose my berth, get the sack——

BETTY. [*Clinging to him.*] We could go to Australia—anywhere——

WALTER. I've no money.

BETTY. [*With a sudden movement, raising her head and leaving him.*] And Mary Gillingham has lots?

WALTER. It's not for her money that I——

BETTY. [*With a start.*] You love her?

WALTER. [*Dropping his head, and speaking under his breath.*] Yes.

BETTY. [*Wringing her hands.*] You do, you do?

WALTER. Yes, that's the truth—I do. Oh, Betty I'm so frightfully sorry——

BETTY. [*With a groan.*] Then you don't love me any more . . .

WALTER. It's not that. But you see——

BETTY. [*Moaning.*] You don't, you don't!

[*She stands there, crushed, overwhelmed, dry-eyed, broken moans escaping from her; suddenly she hears a key turning in the lock of the hall-door outside, and rushes to the card-table.*

BETTY. Hector! Quick, quick—the cards!

[WALTER *flies to the table, and sits by her side. He seizes one pack and proceeds to shuffle it, she is dealing with the other. All this takes only a second.* HECTOR *comes in—they both spring up.*

BETTY. Hector! You're not ill?

HECTOR. [*Kissing her.*] Play postponed, my child—bit of luck! When I got to the theatre I found that the actor-manager's car had collided with a cab outside the stage-door—he was thrown through the window—there's a magnificent exit for you! and has been cut about a bit. Nothing serious. But the play's postponed for a week. Bit of luck!

WALTER. [*Sitting.*] Not for him.

HECTOR. Oh *he* has had luck enough—tons of it! I'll get into a jacket—then we'll have some bridge. See what progress you've made, Betty!

[*He hurries out, and closes the door.*

BETTY. [*Producing a little mirror from her bag,*

looking into it, touching her hair.] We were only just in time.

WALTER. [*Eagerly, as he bends across the table.*] You're splendid—you are—splendid!

BETTY. Yes. All very nice and comfortable for you—isn't it? [*She puts the mirror back into the bag.*

WALTER. [*Coaxingly.*] Betty.

BETTY. To-morrow you'll go to her—or to-night perhaps——

WALTER. To-night—ridiculous! At this hour!

BETTY. She's a deceitful little cat. I saw her last week—she never told me——

WALTER. I don't think she knew. I only proposed to-day.

BETTY. [*Flinging herself back in her chair, and opening wide eyes.*] You—proposed—to-day!

WALTER. [*Very embarrassed.*] Yes—I mean——

BETTY. You—proposed—to-day! And waited till she had accepted you—to tell *me*——

WALTER. [*Eagerly.*] Don't be so silly—come, come, he'll be back in a minute. . . . And, believe me, I'm not worth making a fuss about!

BETTY. [*Looking contemptuously at him.*] That's true.

WALTER. Yes, it is, worse luck! I deserve all you've said to me. And you'll be . . . much better . . . without me.

BETTY. Better?

WALTER. Yes, better, better—any way you choose to put it! I'm a—but never mind that!—Look here—you'd like me to stop?

BETTY. He wants to play bridge.

WALTER. Don't you think that I——

BETTY. [*Hearing* HECTOR *coming.*] Sh.

[HECTOR *comes in—she is idly tossing the cards about.* HECTOR *has put on a smoking-jacket—he comes in, very jolly, fussing around, rubbing his hands, so glad to be home. He sits, to the right of* BETTY.

HECTOR. Now for a game!

[*He seizes a pack, and spreads out the cards.*

BETTY. [*Leaning back.*] Not sure that I want to play.

HECTOR. Don't be disagreeable, Betty! Why?

BETTY. [*Listlessly, as she rises and moves across the room.*] No fun, being three.

HECTOR. Good practice for you. Come on.

BETTY. [*Leaning against the other table, and turning and facing them.*] Besides, *he* has something to tell you.

HECTOR. Walter?

BETTY. Yes.

HECTOR. [*Looking inquiringly at* WALTER.] To tell *me?* What is it?

BETTY. That he's engaged.

HECTOR. [*Shouting, as he leans across the table.*] Never! Walter! Engaged? You?

WALTER. [*Nervously.*] Yes.

HECTOR. [*Noisily and affectionately.*] You old scoundrel! You rascal and villain! Engaged—and

you don't come and tell *me* first! Well I—am—damned!

WALTER. [*Trying to take it gaily.*] I knew you'd chaff me about it.

HECTOR. Chaff you! Silly old coon! why I'm glad! Of course we shall miss you—but marriage—it's the only thing, my boy—the only thing! Who is she? Do I know her?

WALTER. [*Mumbling, as he fingers the cards.*] A friend of Betty's—I fancy you've met her——

HECTOR. Who?

BETTY. Mary Gillingham. We're the first to know—he only proposed to-day.

HECTOR. Gillingham, Gillingham. . . . Oh yes, I've seen her, just seen her, but I don't remember. . . . I say, not the daughter of the sealing-wax man?

WALTER. Yes.

HECTOR. Then there's lots of tin! Fine! Oh you artful old dodger! Is she pretty?

WALTER. So-so.

BETTY. [*Still leaning against the table, and looking at them both.*] She's excessively pretty. She has yellow hair and blue eyes.

HECTOR. [*Chuckling.*] And she has caught old Wallie. The cynical old Wallie who sniffed at women! Though perhaps it's the money——

BETTY. No. He's in love with her.

HECTOR. That's good. I'm glad. And I congratulate you—heartily, my boy. [*He seizes* WALTER'S

hand, and wrings it.] We must drink to it! [*He gets up, goes to the side-table, and pours some whiskey into a tumbler.*] Charge your glass, Walter! [WALTER *rises and goes to the side-table.*] Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the bride and bridegroom! [*He fills the glass from the syphon and passes it to* WALTER, *then proceeds to fill his own.*] Betty, you must join us.

BETTY. [*Quietly.*] No.

HECTOR. You can't toast him in water, of course. Has she cleared away yet? I'll get you some Hock.

[*He puts his glass down and moves to the door at back.*

BETTY. Don't be so silly. I won't drink at all.

HECTOR. [*Amazed.*] Not to old Walter?

BETTY. [*Steadily.*] No.

HECTOR. Why?

BETTY. [*Almost jeeringly.*] Because—old Walter—has been my lover.

HECTOR. [*Stopping, and staring at her.*] What?

BETTY. [*Calmly, looking full at him.*] My lover . . . these last two years.

HECTOR. [*Staring stupidly at her.*] He has been——

BETTY. [*Impatiently, as she taps the floor with her foot.*] Yes, yes. How often must I tell you? My lover—don't you know what that means? Why do you stare at me with those fat goggle-eyes of yours? He has been my lover—and now he has fallen in love with this girl and means to marry her. That's all.

HECTOR. [*Turning towards* WALTER, *who hasn't stirred from the side-table.*] What? You?

[WALTER *remains motionless and silent.*

HECTOR. [*In muffled tones, scarcely able to speak.*] You! It's true what this woman says?

BETTY. [*Contemptuously.*] This woman! Don't be so melodramatic! Have you forgotten my name?

HECTOR. [*Turning fiercely to her, roaring madly.*] Silence, Jezebel! [*She shrinks back, in alarm, towards the fire.*] Your name! Wait a bit, I'll tell you! [*He takes a step towards her—she crouches in terror against the wall.*] You shall hear what your name is! Just now I'm dealing with *him.* [*He swings round to* WALTER.] You there, you skunk and thief! You, you lying hound! I was your best friend. So you've taken my wife, have you? And now mean to go off and marry this girl. That's it? Oh, it's so simple! Here—come here—sit down. Sit down, I tell you. Here, in this chair. Shall I have to drag you to it? I want to keep my hands off you. Here. [WALTER *has moved slowly towards him.* HECTOR *has banged down a chair behind the centre table,* WALTER *sits in it*—HECTOR *speaks over his shoulder to* BETTY.] And you—fetch pen and ink and paper——

BETTY. [*In abject panic.*] Hector——

HECTOR. [*Turning fiercely and scowling at her.*] If you speak to me I'll brain you too. Just you go in there and fetch the things. D'you hear? Go. [*She moves into the other room.* HECTOR *swings round to* WALTER.] As for you, you're a scoundrel. A

rogue, a thief, a liar, a traitor. Of the very worst kind, the blackest. Not an ordinary case of a husband and wife—I trusted you—you were my best friend. You spawn, you thing of the gutter, you foul-hearted, damnable slug!

[BETTY *comes back, dragging her feet, carrying paper and envelopes and a stylograph—she puts them on the table.*

HECTOR. Not that stylograph—that's mine—his dirty hands shan't touch it—I could never use it again. Fetch *your* pen—yours—you belong to him, don't you? Go in and fetch it. D'you hear?

[BETTY *goes into the inner room again.*

HECTOR. My wife. And you the man I've done more for than for any one else in the world. The man I cared for, you low dog. Used my house—came here because it was dull at the Club—and took my wife? I don't know why I don't kill you. I've the right. But I won't. You shall pay for it, my fine fellow—you are going to pay—now.

[BETTY *brings a pen and an inkstand; she places them on the table;* HECTOR *seizes them and pushes them in front of* WALTER. BETTY *slinks to the other side of the room, and stands by the sofa.*

HECTOR. [*To* WALTER.] Now you write. You hear? You write what I dictate. Word for word. What's the old brute's name?

WALTER. Whose?

HECTOR. Whose! Her father, the sealing-wax man, old Gillingham?

WALTER. [*Staring.*] Gillingham?

HECTOR. Gillingham. Yes. What is it?

WALTER. You want me to write to him?

HECTOR. [*Nodding.*] To him. Who else? A confession? I've had that. His name?

WALTER. [*Dropping the pen and half rising.*] I won't——

HECTOR. [*Springing upon him in a mad fury, and forcing him back into the chair.*] You won't, you dog! You dare say that—to me! By Heaven, you will! You'll lick the dust off this floor, if I tell you! You'll go on your hands and knees, and crawl! Sit down, you! Sit down and take up your filthy pen. So. [*Thoroughly cowed,* WALTER *has taken up the pen again.*] And now—his name. Don't make me ask you again, I tell you, don't. What is it?

WALTER. Richard.

HECTOR. Very well, Richard. So write that down. To Richard Gillingham. I have to-day proposed to your daughter, and she has accepted me. Got that? She has accepted me. But I can't marry her—can't marry her—because I have seduced the wife of my friend Hector Allen——

WALTER. [*Appealingly, dropping his pen.*] Hector!

HECTOR. [*Frantically gripping* WALTER *by the throat, till he takes up his pen again.*] The wife of my friend Hector Allen—write it—and plainly, you

hound, plainly—so—and because I am taking the woman away with me to-night.

BETTY. [*With a loud cry.*] Hector!

HECTOR. [*Over his shoulder, watching* WALTER *write.*] Silence, over there, you! Hold your tongue! Go into your room and put on your things—we've done with you here! Take what you want—I don't care—you don't show your face here again. And you—[*he taps his clenched hand against* WALTER'S *arm*] write. What are you stopping for? How far have you got? [*He peers over* WALTER'S *shoulder.*] Because—I—am—taking—the—woman—away—with—me—to-night.

BETTY. [*Beside herself, wringing her hands.*] Hector, Hector——

HECTOR. [*Savagely, as he makes a half-turn towards her.*] You still there? Wait a bit. I'll come to you, when I've finished with him. If you haven't gone and put on your things, you shall go off without them. Into the street. You'll find other women there like you. [*He turns back to* WALTER.] Here, you, have you written? [*He looks over* WALTER'S *shoulder.*] Go on—I'm getting impatient. Go on, I tell you. I—am—taking—the——

[WALTER *is slowly writing down the words,* HECTOR *standing over him;* BETTY *suddenly bursts into a peal of wild, uproarious laughter, and lets herself fall into a chair to the left of the card-table.*

HECTOR. [*Madly.*] You!

[*He leaves* WALTER, *and almost springs at her.*]

BETTY. [*Brimming with merriment.*] Oh, you old donkey! *How* we have pulled your leg!

HECTOR. [*Staring at her, stopping dead short.*] You——

BETTY. [*Through her laughter, choking.*] Hector, Hector! Conventional situations! The usual stodge! The lover and husband! You goose, you wonderful old goose!

[WALTER, *with a mighty effort, has pulled himself together, and roars with laughter too. He jumps up.* HECTOR *is standing there blinking, paralysed.*

WALTER. [*Merrily, to* BETTY.] Oh really, you shouldn't. You've given it away too soon!

BETTY. Too soon! He'd have strangled us. Did you ever see such a tiger?

WALTER. [*Chuckling hugely.*] He didn't give the lover much chance to stand up to him, did he?

BETTY. And *wasn't* he original! Dog, hound, villain, traitor!

WALTER. To say nothing of Jezebel! Though, between ourselves, I think he meant Messalina!

BETTY. And I was to go into the street. But he *did* let me fill my bag!

WALTER. I think the playwrights come out on top, I do indeed. [*He goes to* HECTOR, *and stands to left of him.*] Hector, old chap, here's the letter!

BETTY. [*Going to the other side of* HECTOR, *and dropping a low curtsey.*] And please, Mr. Husband, was it to

be a big bag, or a small bag, and might I have taken the silver teapot?

[HECTOR *has been standing there stupid, dazed, dumbfounded, too bewildered for his mind to act or thoughts to come to him; he suddenly bursts into a roar of Titanic, overwhelming laughter. He laughs, and laughs, staggers to the sofa, falls on it, rocks and roars till the tears roll down his cheeks. He sways from side to side, unable to control himself—his laughter is so colossal that the infection catches the others; theirs becomes genuine too.*]

BETTY. [*With difficulty, trying to control herself.*] The letter! Old Gillingham! "His name, scoundrel, his name!"

WALTER. [*Gurgling.*] With his hand at my throat! Sit there, villain, and write!

BETTY. "I'll deal with *you* presently! Wait till I've finished with *him!*"

WALTER. "Into the street!" At least, they *do* usually say "into the night!"

HECTOR. [*Rubbing his eyes and panting for breath.*] Oh, you pair of blackguards! Too bad—no, really too bad! It was! I fell in, I did! Oh, Lord, oh, Lord, what a nightmare! But it wasn't right, really it wasn't—no really! My Lord, how I floundered—head and shoulders—swallowed it all! Comes of reading that muck every day—never stopped to think! I didn't! Walter, old chap! [*He holds out his hand.*

Betty! My poor Betty! [*He draws her towards him.*] The things I said to you!

BETTY. [*Carelessly eluding the caress.*] At least admit that you're rather hard on the playwriting people!

HECTOR. [*Getting up and shaking himself.*] Oh, they be blowed! Well, you *have* had a game with me! [*He shakes himself again.*] Brrrrr! Oh, my Lord! What I went through!

BETTY. It *was* a lark! you should have seen yourself! Your eyes starting out of your head! You looked like a murderer!

HECTOR. By Jove, and I felt it! For two pins I'd have——

BETTY. And Mary Gillingham! *That's* the funniest part! That you could have thought *he* was engaged —to *her!*

[*Involuntarily the smile dies away on* WALTER'S *face; he turns and stares at her; she goes on calmly.*

BETTY. When she happens to be the one girl in this world he can't stand!

WALTER. [*With a movement that he can't control.* Betty!

BETTY. [*Turning smilingly to him.*] No harm in my telling Hector—he scarcely knows her! [*She swings round to* HECTOR *again.*] Why, Walter simply *loathes* the poor girl! That's what made it so funny! [*At the mere thought of it she bursts out laughing again, and goes on speaking through her laughter.*] And I tell

you—if you ever hear he's engaged to *her*—why, you can believe the rest of the story too!

HECTOR. [*Laughing heartily as he pats* WALTER *on the shoulder.*] Poor old Walter! And, d'you know, I was quite pleased at the thought of his getting married! I was! [*He turns to him.*] But it's better, old chap, for us—we'd have missed you—terribly! [*With another pat on* WALTER'S *shoulder, he goes to the fire, and drops in the letter.*] Mustn't leave *that* lying about! [*He turns.*] Well, by Jove, if any one had told me. . . . And drinking to him, and all!

BETTY. If you'll fetch me that glass of Hock now, I *will* drink to him, Hector. To Walter, the Bachelor!

HECTOR. [*Beaming.*] So we will! Good. I'll get it.

[*He bustles into the dining-room.*

BETTY. [*Moving swiftly to* WALTER.] Well, now's your time. One thing or the other.

WALTER. [*Savagely.*] You fiend!

BETTY. I'll go and see her to-morrow—see her constantly——

WALTER. Why are you doing this?

BETTY. You've ruined my life and his. At least, *you* shan't be happy.

WALTER. And you imagine I'll come back to *you*—that we'll go on, you and I?

BETTY. [*Scornfully.*] No—don't be afraid! You've shown yourself to me to-day. That's all done with—finished. *His* friend now—with the load off you—but never *her* husband. Never!

[HECTOR *comes bustling back, with the bottle of Hock, and a wine-glass that he gives to* BETTY—*she holds it, and he fills it from the bottle.*

HECTOR. Here you are, my girl—and now, where's my whiskey? [*He trots round to the side table, finds his glass, and* WALTER'S—*hands one to* WALTER.] Here, Wallie—yours must be the one that's begun—I didn't have time to touch mine! Here. [WALTER *takes it.*] And forgive me, old man, for thinking, even one minute—[*He wrings him by the hand.*] Here's to you, old friend. And Betty, to you! Oh, Lord, I just want this drink!

BETTY. [*In cold, clear tones, as she holds up her glass.*] To Walter, the Bachelor!

[*She drains her glass;* WALTER *has his moment's hesitation; he drinks, and with tremendous effort succeeds in composing his face.*

HECTOR. [*Gaily.*] To Walter, the Bachelor! [*He drinks his glass to the dregs and puts it down.*] And now—for a game.

WALTER. I think I——

HECTOR. [*Coaxingly.*] Sit down, laddie—just one rubber. It's quite early. Do. There's a good chap. [*They all sit:* HECTOR *at back,* BETTY *to the left of him,* WALTER *to the right—he spreads out the cards—they draw for partners.*] As we are—you and Betty—I've got the dummy. [*He shuffles the cards*—BETTY *cuts—he begins to deal.*] That's how I like it—one

on each side of me. Also I like having dummy. Now, Betty, play up. Oh, Lord, how good it is, how good! A nightmare, I tell you—terrible! And really you must forgive me for being such an ass. But the way you played up, both of you! My little Betty—a Duse, that's what she is—a real Duse! [*He gathers up his cards.*] And the gods are kind to me—I've got a hand, I tell you! I call NO TRUMPS!

[*He beams at them—they are placidly sorting their cards. He puts his hand down and proceeds to look at his dummy, as the curtain falls.*

CURTAIN

A MARRIAGE HAS BEEN ARRANGED . . . .

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MR. HARRISON CROCKSTEAD

LADY ALINE DE VAUX

Produced at the
Garrick Theatre
on March 27, 1904

51025

A MARRIAGE HAS BEEN ARRANGED . . . .

SCENE: *The conservatory of No. 300 Grosvenor Square. Hour, close on midnight. A ball is in progress, and dreamy waltz music is heard in the distance.*

LADY ALINE DE VAUX *enters, leaning on the arm of* MR. HARRISON CROCKSTEAD.

LADY ALINE *is a tall, exquisitely-gowned girl, of the conventional and much-admired type of beauty. Put her in any drawing-room in the world, and she would at once be recognised as a high-born Englishwoman. She has in her, in embryo, all those excellent qualities that go to make a great lady: the icy stare, the haughty movement of the shoulder, the disdainful arch of the lip; she has also, but only an experienced observer would notice it, something of wistfulness, something that speaks of a sore and wounded heart—though it is sufficiently evident that this organ is kept under admirable control. A girl who has been placed in a position of life where artificiality rules, who has been taught to be artificial and has thoroughly learned her lesson; yet one who would unhesitatingly know the proper thing to do did a camel bolt*

with her in the desert, or an eastern potentate invite her to become his two hundred and fifty-seventh wife. In a word, a lady of complete self-possession and magnificent control. MR. CROCKSTEAD *is a big, burly man of forty or so, and of the kind to whom the ordinary West End butler would consider himself perfectly justified in declaring that her ladyship was not at home. And yet his evening clothes sit well on him; and there is a certain air of command about the man that would have made the butler uncomfortable. That functionary would have excused himself by declaring that* MR. CROCKSTEAD *didn't look a gentleman. And perhaps he doesn't. His walk is rather a slouch; he has a way of keeping his hands in his pockets, and of jerking out his sentences; a way, above all, of seeming perfectly indifferent to the comfort of the people he happens to be addressing. The impression he gives is one of power, not of refinement; and the massive face, with its heavy lines, and eyes that are usually veiled, seems to give no clue whatever to the character of the man within.*

The couple break apart when they enter the room; LADY ALINE *is the least bit nervous, though she shows no trace of it;* MR. CROCKSTEAD *absolutely imperturbable and undisturbed.*

CROCKSTEAD. [*Looking around.*] Ah—this is the place—very quiet, retired, romantic—et cetera. Music in the distance—all very appropriate and sentimental.

[*She leaves him, and sits, quietly fanning herself; he stands, looking at her.*] You seem perfectly calm, Lady Aline?

ALINE. [*Sitting.*] Conservatories are not unusual appendages to a ball-room, Mr. Crockstead; nor is this conservatory unlike other conservatories.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Turning to her.*] I wonder why women are always so evasive?

ALINE. With your permission we will not discuss the sex. You and I are too old to be cynical, and too young to be appreciative. And besides, it is a rule of mine, whenever I sit out a dance, that my partner shall avoid the subjects of women—and golf.

CROCKSTEAD. You limit the area of conversation. But then, in this particular instance, I take it, we have not come here to talk?

ALINE. [*Coldly.*] I beg your pardon!

CROCKSTEAD. [*Sitting beside her.*] Lady Aline, they are dancing a cotillon in there, so we have half an hour before us. We shall not be disturbed, for the Duchess, your aunt, has considerately stationed her aged companion in the corridor, with instructions to ward off intruders.

ALINE. [*Very surprised.*] Mr. Crockstead!

CROCKSTEAD. [*Looking hard at her.*] Didn't you know? [ALINE *turns aside, embarrassed.*] That's right—of course you did. Don't you know why I have brought you here? That's right; of course you do. The Duchess, your aunt, and the Marchioness, your mother—observe how fondly my tongue trips out the

titles—smiled sweetly on us as we left the ball-room. There will be a notice in the *Morning Post* to-morrow "A Marriage Has Been Arranged Between——"

ALINE. [*Bewildered and offended.*] Mr. Crockstead! This—this is——

CROCKSTEAD. [*Always in the same quiet tone.*] Because I have not yet proposed, you mean? Of course I intend to, Lady Aline. Only as I know that you will accept me——

ALINE. [*In icy tones, as she rises.*] Let us go back to the ball-room.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Quite undisturbed.*] Oh, please! That won't help us, you know. Do sit down. I assure you I have never proposed before, so that naturally I am a trifle nervous. Of course I know that we are only supers really, without much of a speaking part; but the spirit moves me to gag, in the absence of the stage-manager, who is, let us say, the Duchess——

ALINE. I have heard of the New Humour, Mr. Crockstead, though I confess I have never understood it. This may be an exquisite example——

CROCKSTEAD. By no means. I am merely trying to do the right thing, though perhaps not the conventional one. Before making you the formal offer of my hand and fortune, which amounts to a little over three millions——

ALINE. [*Fanning herself.*] How people exaggerate! Between six and seven, *I* heard.

CROCKSTEAD. Only three at present, but we must be patient. Before throwing myself at your feet,

metaphorically, I am anxious that you should know something of the man whom you are about to marry.

ALINE. That is really most considerate!

CROCKSTEAD. I have the advantage of you, you see, inasmuch as you have many dear friends, who have told me all about you.

ALINE. [*With growing exasperation, but keeping very cool.*] Indeed?

CROCKSTEAD. I am aware, for instance, that this is your ninth season——

ALINE. [*Snapping her fan.*] You are remarkably well-informed.

CROCKSTEAD. I have been told that again to-night, three times, by charming young women who vowed that they loved you. Now, as I have no dearest friends, it is unlikely that you will have heard anything equally definite concerning myself. I propose to enlighten you.

ALINE. [*Satirically.*] The story of your life—how thrilling!

CROCKSTEAD. I trust you may find it so. [*He sits, and pauses for a moment, then begins, very quietly.*] Lady Aline, I am a self-made man, as the foolish phrase has it—a man whose early years were spent in savage and desolate places, where the devil had much to say; a man in whom whatever there once had been of natural kindness was very soon kicked out. I was poor, and lonely, for thirty-two years: I have been rich, and lonely, for ten. My millions have been made honestly enough; but poverty and wretchedness

had left their mark on me, and you will find very few men with a good word to say for Harrison Crockstead. I have no polish, or culture, or tastes. Art wearies me, literature sends me to sleep——

ALINE. When you come to the chapter of your personal deficiencies, Mr. Crockstead, please remember that they are sufficiently evident for me to have already observed them.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Without a trace of annoyance.*] That is true. I will pass, then, to more intimate matters. In a little township in Australia—a horrible place where there was gold—I met a woman whom I loved. She was what is technically known as a bad woman. She ran away with another man. I tracked them to Texas, and in a mining camp there I shot the man. I wanted to take the woman back, but she refused. That has been my solitary love affair; and I shall never love any woman again as I loved her. I think that is all that I have to tell you. And now—will you marry me, Lady Aline?

ALINE. [*Very steadily, facing him.*] Not if you were the last man in this world, Mr. Crockstead.

CROCKSTEAD. [*With a pleasant smile.*] At least that is emphatic.

ALINE. See, I will give you confidence for confidence. This is, as you suggest, my ninth season. Living in an absurd milieu where marriage with a wealthy man is regarded as the one aim in life, I have, during the past few weeks, done all that lay in my power to wring a proposal from you.

CROCKSTEAD. I appreciate your sincerity.

ALINE. Perhaps the knowledge that other women were doing the same lent a little zest to the pursuit, which otherwise would have been very dreary; for I confess that your personality did not—especially appeal to me.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Cheerfully.*] Thank you very much.

ALINE. Not at all. Indeed, this room being the Palace of Truth, I will admit that it was only by thinking hard of your three millions that I have been able to conceal the weariness I have felt in your society. And now will you marry me, Mr. Crockstead?

CROCKSTEAD. [*Serenely.*] I fancy that's what we're here for, isn't it?

ALINE. [*Stamping her foot.*] I have, of course, been debarred from the disreputable amours on which you linger so fondly; but I loved a soldier cousin of mine, and would have run away with him had my mother not packed me off in time. He went to India, and I stayed here; but he is the only man I have loved or ever shall love. Further, let me tell you I am twenty-eight; I have always been poor—I hate poverty, and it has soured me no less than you. Dress is the thing in life I care for most, vulgarity my chief abomination. And to be frank, I consider you the most vulgar person I have ever met. Will you still marry me, Mr. Crockstead?

CROCKSTEAD. [*With undiminished cheerfulness.*] Why not?

ALINE. This is an outrage. Am I a horse, do you think, or a ballet-dancer? Do you imagine I will sell myself to you for your three millions?

CROCKSTEAD. Logic, my dear Lady Aline, is evidently not one of your more special possessions. For, had it not been for my—somewhat eccentric preliminaries—you *would* have accepted me, would you not?

ALINE. [*Embarrassed.*] I—I——

CROCKSTEAD. If I had said to you, timidly: "Lady Aline, I love you: I am a simple, unsophisticated person; will you marry me?" You would have answered, "Yes, Harrison, I will."

ALINE. It is a mercy to have escaped marrying a man with such a Christian name as Harrison.

CROCKSTEAD. It has been in the family for generations, you know; but it is a strange thing that I am always called Harrison, and that no one ever adopts the diminutive.

ALINE. That does not surprise me: we have no pet name for the East wind.

CROCKSTEAD. The possession of millions, you see, Lady Aline, puts you into eternal quarantine. It is a kind of yellow fever, with the difference that people are perpetually anxious to catch your complaint. But we digress. To return to the question of our marriage——

ALINE. I beg your pardon.

CROCKSTEAD. I presume that it is—arranged?

ALINE [*Haughtily.*] Mr. Crockstead, let me remind you that frankness has its limits: exceeding these, it

is apt to degenerate into impertinence. Be good enough to conduct me to the ball-room.

[*She moves to the door.*

CROCKSTEAD. You have five sisters, I believe, Lady Aline? [ALINE *stops short.*] All younger than yourself, all marriageable, and all unmarried?

[ALINE *hangs her head and is silent.*

CROCKSTEAD. Your father——

ALINE. [*Fiercely.*] Not a word of my father!

CROCKSTEAD. Your father is a gentleman. The breed is rare, and very fine when you get it. But he is exceedingly poor. People marry for money nowadays; and your mother will be very unhappy if this marriage of ours falls through.

ALINE. [*Moving a step towards him.*] Is it to oblige my mother, then, that you desire to marry me?

CROCKSTEAD. Well, no. But you see I must marry some one, in mere self-defence; and honestly, I think you will do at least as well as any one else. [ALINE *bursts out laughing.*] That strikes you as funny?

ALINE. If you had the least grain of chivalrous feeling, you would realise that the man who could speak to a woman as you have spoken to me——

[*She pauses.*

CROCKSTEAD. Yes?

ALINE. I leave you to finish the sentence.

CROCKSTEAD. Thank you. I will finish it my own way. I will say that when a woman deliberately tries to wring an offer of marriage from a man whom

she does not love, she deserves to be spoken to as I have spoken to you, Lady Aline.

ALINE. [*Scornfully.*] Love! What has love to do with marriage?

CROCKSTEAD. That remark rings hollow. You have been good enough to tell me of your cousin, whom you did love——

ALINE. Well?

CROCKSTEAD. And with whom you would have eloped, had your mother not prevented you.

ALINE. I most certainly should.

CROCKSTEAD. So you see that at one period of your life you thought differently.—You were very fond of him?

ALINE. I have told you.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Meditatively.*] If I had been he, mother or no mother, money or no money, I would have carried you off. I fancy it must be pleasant to be loved by you, Lady Aline.

ALINE. [*Dropping a mock curtsey, as she sits on the sofa.*] You do me too much honour.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Still thoughtful, moving about the room.*] Next to being king, it is good to be maker of kings. Where is this cousin now?

ALINE. In America. But might I suggest that we have exhausted the subject?

CROCKSTEAD. Do you remember your "Arabian Nights," Lady Aline?

ALINE. Vaguely.

CROCKSTEAD. You have at least not forgotten that sublime Caliph, Haroun Al-Raschid?

ALINE. Oh, no—but why?

CROCKSTEAD. We millionaires are the Caliphs to-day; and we command more faithful than ever bowed to them. And, like that old scoundrel Haroun, we may at times permit ourselves a respectable impulse. What is your cousin's address?

ALINE. Again I ask—why?

CROCKSTEAD. I will put him in a position to marry you.

ALINE. [*In extreme surprise.*] What! [*She rises.*

CROCKSTEAD. Oh, don't be alarmed, I'll manage it pleasantly. I'll give him tips, shares, speculate for him, make him a director of one or two of my companies. He shall have an income of four thousand a year. You can live on that.

ALINE. You are not serious?

CROCKSTEAD. Oh yes; and though men may not like me, they always trust my word. You may.

ALINE. And why will you do this thing?

CROCKSTEAD. Call it caprice—call it a mere vulgar desire to let my magnificence dazzle you—call it the less vulgar desire to know that my money has made you happy with the man you love.

ALINE. That is generous.

CROCKSTEAD. I remember an old poem I learnt at school—which told how Frederick the Great coveted a mill that adjoined a favourite estate of his; but the miller refused to sell. Frederick could have turned him out, of course—there was not very much public opinion in those days—but he respected the miller's

firmness, and left him in solid possession. And mark that, at that very same time, he annexed—in other words stole—the province of Silesia.

ALINE. Ah——

CROCKSTEAD. [*Moving to the fireplace*].

"Ce sont là jeux de Princes:
Ils respectent un meunier,
Ils volent une province."

[*The music stops.*

ALINE. You speak French?

CROCKSTEAD. I am fond of it. It is the true and native language of insincerity.

ALINE. And yet you seem sincere.

CROCKSTEAD. I am permitting myself that luxury to-night. I am uncorking, let us say, the one bottle of '47 port left in my cellar.

ALINE. You are not quite fair to yourself, perhaps.

CROCKSTEAD. Do not let this action of mine cause you too suddenly to alter your opinion. The verdict you pronounced before was, on the whole, just.

ALINE. What verdict?

CROCKSTEAD. I was the most unpleasant person you ever had met.

ALINE. That was an exaggeration.

CROCKSTEAD. The most repulsive——

ALINE. [*Quickly.*] I did not say that.

CROCKSTEAD. And who prided himself on his repulsiveness. Very true, in the main, and yet consider! My wealth dates back ten years; till then I had known hunger, and every kind of sorrow and despair. I had

stretched out longing arms to the world, but not a heart opened to me. And suddenly, when the taste of men's cruelty was bitter in my mouth, capricious fortune snatched me from abject poverty and gave me delirious wealth. I was ploughing a barren field, and flung up a nugget. From that moment gold dogged my footsteps. I enriched the few friends I had—they turned howlingly from me because I did not give them more. I showered money on whoever sought it of me—they cursed me because it was mine to give. In my poverty there had been the bond of common sorrow between me and my fellows: in my wealth I stand alone, a modern Ishmael, with every man's hand against me.

ALINE. [*Gently.*] Why do you tell me this?

CROCKSTEAD. Because I am no longer asking you to marry me. Because you are the first person in all these years who has been truthful and frank with me. And because, perhaps, in the happiness that will, I trust, be yours, I want you to think kindly of me. [*She puts out her hand, he takes it.*] And now, shall we return to the ball-room? The music has stopped; they must be going to supper.

ALINE. What shall I say to the Marchioness, my mother, and the Duchess, my aunt?

CROCKSTEAD. You will acquaint those noble ladies with the fact of your having refused me.

[*They have both risen, and move up the room together.*

ALINE. I shall be a nine days' wonder. And how do you propose to carry out your little scheme?

CROCKSTEAD. I will take Saturday's boat—you will give me a line to your cousin. I had better state the case plainly to him, perhaps?

ALINE. That demands consideration.

CROCKSTEAD. And I will tell you what you shall do for me in return. Find me a wife!

ALINE. I?

CROCKSTEAD. You. I beg it on my knees. I give you carte blanche. I undertake to propose, with my eyes shut, to the woman you shall select.

ALINE. And will you treat her to the—little preliminaries—with which you have favoured me?

CROCKSTEAD. No. I said those things to you because I liked you.

ALINE. And you don't intend to like the other one?

CROCKSTEAD. I will marry her. I can trust you to find me a loyal and intelligent woman.

ALINE. In Society?

CROCKSTEAD. For preference. She will be better versed in spending money than a governess, or country parson's daughter.

ALINE. But why this voracity for marriage?

CROCKSTEAD. Lady Aline, I am hunted, pestered, worried, persecuted. I have settled two breach of promise actions already, though Heaven knows I did no more than remark it was a fine day, or enquire after the lady's health. If you do not help me, some energetic woman will capture me—I feel it—and

bully me for the rest of my days. I raise a despairing cry to you—Find me a wife!

ALINE. Do you desire the lady to have any—special qualifications?

CROCKSTEAD. No—the home-grown article will do. One thing, though—I should like her to be—merciful.

ALINE. I don't understand.

CROCKSTEAD. I have a vague desire to do something with my money: my wife might help me. I should like her to have pity.

ALINE. Pity?

CROCKSTEAD. In the midst of her wealth I should wish her to be sorry for those who are poor.

ALINE. Yes. And, as regards the rest——

CROCKSTEAD. The rest I leave to you, with absolute confidence. You will help me?

ALINE. I will try. My choice is to be final?

CROCKSTEAD. Absolutely.

ALINE. I have an intimate friend—I wonder whether she would do?

CROCKSTEAD. Tell me about her.

ALINE. She and I made our début the same season. Like myself she has hitherto been her mother's despair.

CROCKSTEAD. Because she has not yet——

ALINE. Married—yes. Oh, if men knew how hard the lot is of the portionless girl, who has to sit, and smile, and wait, with a very desolate heart—they would think less unkindly of her, perhaps—[*She smiles.*] But I am digressing, too.

CROCKSTEAD. Tell me more of your friend.

ALINE. She is outwardly hard, and a trifle bitter, but I fancy sunshine would thaw her. There has not been much happiness in her life.

CROCKSTEAD. Would she marry a man she did not love?

ALINE. If she did you would not respect her?

CROCKSTEAD. I don't say that. She will be your choice; and therefore deserving of confidence. Is she handsome?

ALINE. Well—no.

CROCKSTEAD. [*With a quick glance at her.*] That's a pity. But we can't have everything.

ALINE. No. There is one episode in her life that I feel she would like you to know——

CROCKSTEAD. If you are not betraying a confidence——

ALINE. [*Looking down.*] No. She loved a man, years ago, very dearly. They were too poor to marry, but they vowed to wait. Within six months she learned that he was engaged.

CROCKSTEAD. Ah!

ALINE. To a fat and wealthy widow——

CROCKSTEAD. The old story.

ALINE. Who was touring through India, and had been made love to by every unmarried officer in the regiment. She chose him.

CROCKSTEAD. India? [*He moves towards her.*]

ALINE. Yes.

CROCKSTEAD. I have an idea that I shall like your friend. [*He takes her hand in his.*]

ALINE. I shall be careful to tell her all that you said to me—at the beginning——

CROCKSTEAD. It is quite possible that my remarks may not apply after all.

ALINE. But I believe myself from what I know of you both that—if she marries you—it will not be—altogether—for your money.

CROCKSTEAD. Listen—they're playing "God Save the King." Will you be my wife, Aline?

ALINE. Yes—Harry.

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.*

CURTAIN

THE MAN ON THE KERB

A DUOLOGUE

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOSEPH MATTHEWS
MARY (HIS WIFE)

TIME—*The present*

SCENE—*Their home in the West End*

Produced at the
Aldwych Theatre
on March 24, 1908

THE MAN ON THE KERB

SCENE: *An underground room, bare of any furniture except two or three broken chairs, a tattered mattress on the stone floor and an old trunk. On a packing-chest are a few pots and pans and a kettle. A few sacks are spread over the floor, close to the empty grate; the walls are discoloured, with plentiful signs of damp oozing through. Close to the door, at back, is a window, looking on to the area; two of the panes are broken and stuffed with paper.*

On the mattress a child is sleeping, covered with a tattered old mantle; MARY *is bending over her, crooning a song. The woman is still quite young, and must have been very pretty; but her cheeks are hollow and there are great circles round her eyes; her face is very pale and bloodless. Her dress is painfully worn and shabby, but displays pathetic attempts at neatness. The only light in the room comes from the street lamp on the pavement above.*

JOE *comes down the area steps, and enters. His clothes are of the familiar colourless, shapeless kind one sees at street corners; he would be a pleasant-looking young fellow enough were it not*

that his face is abnormally lined, and pinched, and weather-beaten. He shambles in, with the intense weariness of a man who has for hours been forcing benumbed limbs to move; he shakes himself, on the threshold, dog-fashion, to get rid of the rain. MARY *first makes sure that the child is asleep, then rises eagerly and goes to him. Her face falls as she notes his air of dejection.*

MARY. [*Wistfully.*] Nothing, Joe?

JOE. Nothing. Not a farthing. Nothing.

[MARY *turns away and checks a moan.*

JOE. Nothing at all. Same as yesterday—worse than yesterday—I *did* bring home a few coppers—And you?

MARY. A lady gave Minnie some food——

JOE. [*Heartily.*] Bless her for that!

MARY. Took her into the pastrycook's, Joe——

JOE. And the kiddie had a tuck-out? Thank God! And you?

MARY. Minnie managed to hide a great big bun for me.

JOE. The lady didn't give you anything?

MARY. Only a lecture, Joe, for bringing the child out on so bitter a day.

JOE. [*With a sour laugh, as he sits on a chair.*] Ho, ho! Always so ready with their lectures, aren't they? "Shouldn't beg, my man! Never give to beggars in the street!"—Look at me, I said to one of them. Feel my arm. Tap my chest. I tell you

I'm starving, and they're starving at home.—"Never give to beggars in the street."

MARY. [*Laying a hand on his arm.*] Oh, Joe, you're wet!

JOE. It's been raining hard the last three hours—pouring. My stars, it's cold. Couldn't we raise a bit of fire, Mary?

MARY. With what, Joe?

JOE. [*After a look round, suddenly getting up, seizing a ricketty chair by the wall, breaking off the legs.*] With this! Wonderful fine furniture they give you on the Hire System—so solid and substantial—as advertised. [*He breaks the flimsy thing up, as he speaks.*] And to think we paid for this muck, in the days we were human beings—paid about three times its value! And to think of the poor devils, poor devils like us, who sweated their life-blood out to make it—and of the blood-sucking devils who sold it and got fat on it—and now back it goes to the devil it came from, and we can at least get warm for a minute. [*He crams the wood into the grate.*] Got any paper, Mary?

MARY. [*Taking an old newspaper from the trunk.*] Here, Joe.

JOE. That will help to build up a fire. [*He glances at it, then lays it carefully underneath the wood.* MARY *gets lamp from table.*] The Daily Something or other—that tells the world what a happy people we are—how proud of belonging to an Empire on which the sun never sets. And I'd sell Gibraltar to-night for a

sausage with mashed potatoes; and let Russia take India if some one would give me a clerkship at a pound a week.—There, in you go! A match, Mary?

MARY. [*Standing above* JOE, *handing him one.*] Oh, Joe, be careful—we've only two left!

JOE. I'll be careful. Wait, though—I'll see whether there's a bit of tobacco still in my pipe. [*He fishes the pipe out of his pocket.*] A policeman who warned me away from the kerb gave me some tobacco. "Mustn't beg," he said. "Got a pipe? Well, here's some tobacco." I believe he'd have given me money. But it was the first kind word I had heard all day, and it choked me.—There's just a bit left at the bottom. [*He bustles.*] Now, first the fire. [*He puts the match to the paper—it kindles.*] And then my pipe. [*The fire burns up; he throws himself in front of it.*] Boo-o-oh, I'm sizzling. . . . I got so wet that I felt the water running into my lungs—my feet didn't seem to belong to me—and as for my head and nose! [*Yawns.*] Well, smoke's good—by the powers, I'm getting warm—come closer to it, Mary. It's a little after midnight now—and I left home, this fine, luxurious British home, just as soon as it was light. And I've tramped the streets all day. Net result, a policeman gave me a pipeful of tobacco, I lunched off a bit of bread that I saw floating down the gutter—and I dined off the kitchen smell of the Café Royal. That's my day.

MARY. [*Stroking his hand.*] Poor boy, poor boy!

JOE. I stood for an hour in Leicester Square when the theatres emptied, thinking I might earn a copper, calling a cab, or something. There they were, all streaming out, happy and clean and warm—broughams and motor-cars—supper at the Savoy and the Carlton—and a hundred or two of us others in the gutter, hungry—looking at them. They went off to their supper—it was pouring, and I got soaked—and there I stood, dodging the policemen, dodging the horses' heads and the motors—and it was always—get away, you loafer, get away—get away—get away——

MARY. We've done nothing to deserve it, Joe——

JOE. [*With sudden fury.*] Deserve it! What have I ever done wrong! Wasn't *my* fault the firm went bankrupt and I couldn't get another job. I've a first-rate character—I'm respectable—what's the use? I want to work—they won't let me!

MARY. That illness of mine ate up all our savings. O Joe, I wish I had died!

JOE. And left me alone? That's not kind of you, Mary. How about Mrs. Willis? Is she worrying about the rent?

MARY. Well, she'd like to have it, of course—they're so dreadfully poor themselves—but she says she won't turn us out. And I'm going to-morrow to her daughter's upstairs—she makes matchboxes, you know—and I don't see why I shouldn't try—I could earn nearly a shilling a day.

JOE. A shilling a day! Princely! [*His pipe goes*

out. He takes a last puff at it, squints into it to make sure all the tobacco is gone, then lays it down with a sigh.] I reckon *I'll* try making 'em too. I went to the Vestry again, this morning, to see whether they'd take me as sweeper—but they've thirty names down, ahead of me. I've tried chopping wood, but I can't—I begin to cough the third stroke—there's something wrong with me inside, somewhere. I've tried every Institution on God's earth—and there are others before me, and there is no vacancy, and I mustn't beg, and I mustn't worry the gentlemen. A shilling a day—can one earn as much as that! Why, Mary, that will be fourteen shillings a week—an income! We'll do it!

MARY. It's not quite a shilling, Joe—you have to find your own paste and odds and ends. And of course it takes a few weeks to learn, before you begin to make any money.

JOE. [*Crestfallen.*] Does it though? And what are we going to do, those few weeks? I thought there was a catch in it, somewhere. [*He gets up and stretches himself.*] Well, here's a free-born Englishman, able to conduct correspondence in three languages, book-keeping by double entry, twelve years' experience—and all he's allowed to do is to starve. [*He stretches himself again.*]

But in spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations——

[*With sudden passion.*] God! I wish I were a Zulu!

MARY. [*Edging to him.*] Joe——

JOE. [*Turning.*] Well?

MARY. Joe, Joe, we've tried very hard, haven't we?

JOE. Tried! Is there a job in this world we'd refuse? Is there anything we'd turn up our nose at? Is there any chance we've neglected?

MARY. [*Stealing nervously to him and laying a hand on his arm.*] Joe——

JOE. [*Raising his head and looking at her.*] Yes—what is it? [*She stands timidly with downcast eyes.*] Well? Out with it, Mary!

MARY. [*Suddenly.*] It's this, Joe.

[*She goes feverishly to the mattress, and from underneath it she pulls out a big, fat purse which she hands him.*

JOE. [*Staring.*] A purse!

MARY. [*Nodding.*] Yes.

JOE. You——

MARY. Found it.

JOE. [*Looking at her.*] Found?

MARY. [*Awkwardly.*] In a way I did—yes.

JOE. How?

MARY. It came on to rain, Joe—and I went into a Tube Station—and was standing by a bookstall, showing Minnie the illustrated papers—and an old lady bought one—and she took out her purse—this purse—and paid for it—and laid the purse on the board while she fumbled to pick up her skirts—and then some one spoke to her—a friend, I suppose—and—there were lots of people standing about—I

don't know how it was—I was out in the street, with Minnie——

JOE. You had the purse?

MARY. Yes——

JOE. No one followed you?

MARY. No one. I couldn't run, as I had to carry Minnie.

JOE. What made you do it?

MARY. I don't know—something in me did it—She put the purse down just by the side of my hand—my fingers clutched it before I knew—and I was out in the street.

JOE. How much is there in it?

MARY. I haven't looked, Joe.

JOE. [*Wondering.*] You haven't looked?

MARY. No; I didn't dare.

JOE. [*Sorrowfully.*] I didn't think we'd come to this, Mary.

MARY. [*Desperately.*] We've got to do something. Before we can earn any money at making matchboxes we'll have to spend some weeks learning. And you've not had a decent meal for a month—nor have I. If there's money inside this purse you can get some clothes—and for me too—I need them! It's not as though the old lady would miss it—she's rich enough—her cloak was real sable—and no one can find us out—they can't tell one piece of money from the other. It's heavy, Joe—I think there's a lot inside.

JOE. [*Weighing it mechanically.*] Yes — it's heavy——

MARY. [*Eagerly.*] Open it, Joe.

JOE. [*Turning to her again.*] Why didn't you?

MARY. I just thought I'd wait—I'd an idea something might have happened; that some one might have stopped you in the street, some one with a heart—and that he'd have come in with you to-night—and seen us—seen Minnie—and said—"Well, here's money—I'll put you on your legs again"—And then we'd have given the purse back, Joe.

JOE. [*As he still mechanically balances it in his hand.*] Yes.

MARY. Can't go on like this, can we? You'll cough all night again, as you did yesterday—and the stuff they gave you at the Dispensary's no good. If you had clothes, you might get some sort of a job perhaps—you know you had to give up trying because you were so shabby.

JOE. They laugh at me.

MARY. [*With a glance at herself.*] And I'm really ashamed to walk through the streets——

JOE. I know—though I'm getting used to it. Besides, there's the kiddie. Let's have a look at her.

MARY. Be careful you don't wake her, Joe!

JOE. There's a fire.

MARY. She'll be hungry.

JOE. You said that she had some food?

MARY. That was at three o'clock. And little things aren't like us—they want their regular meals.

Night after night she has been hungry, and I've had nothing to give her. That's why I took the purse.

JOE. [*Still holding it mechanically and staring at it.*] Yes. And, after all, why not?

MARY. We can get the poor little thing some warm clothes, some good food——

JOE. [*Under his breath.*] A thief's daughter.

[*Covers his face with his hands.*

MARY. Joe!

JOE. Not nice, is it? Can't be helped, of course. And who cares? For three months this game has gone on—we getting shabbier, wretcheder, hungrier—no one bothers—all *they* say is "keep off the pave ment." Let's see what's in the purse.

MARY. [*Eagerly.*] Yes, yes!

JOE. [*Lifting his head as he is on the point of opening the purse.*] That's the policeman passing.

MARY. [*Impatiently.*] Never mind that——

JOE. [*Turning to the purse again.*] First time in my life I've been afraid when I heard the policeman.

[*He has his finger on the catch of the purse when he pauses for a moment—then acting on a sudden impulse, makes a dart for the door, opens it, and is out, and up the area steps.*

MARY. [*With a despairing cry.*] Joe!

[*She flings herself on the mattress, and sobs silently, so as not to awaken the child.* JOE

returns, hanging his head, dragging one foot before the other.

MARY. [*Still sobbing, but trying to control herself.*] Why did you do that?

JOE. [*Humbly.*] I don't know——

MARY. You gave it to the policeman?

JOE. Yes.

MARY. What did you tell him?

JOE. That you had found it.

MARY. Where?

JOE. In a Tube Station. Picked it up because we were starving. That we hadn't opened it. And that we lived here, in this cellar.

MARY. [*With a little shake.*] I expect he'll keep it himself!

JOE. [*Miserably.*] Perhaps.

[*There is silence for a moment; she has ceased to cry; suddenly she raises herself violently on her elbow.*

MARY. You fool! You fool!

JOE. [*Pleading.*] Mary!

MARY. With your stupid ideas of honesty! What have they done for you, or me?

JOE. [*Dropping his head again.*] It's the kiddie, you know—her being a thief's daughter——

MARY. Is that worse than being the daughter of a pair of miserable beggars?

JOE [*Under his breath.*] I suppose it is, somehow——

MARY. You'd rather she went hungry?

JOE. [*Despairingly.*] I don't know how it was—hearing his tramp up there——

MARY. You were afraid?

JOE. I don't want you taken to prison.

MARY. [*With a wail.*] I'll be taken to the graveyard soon, in a pauper's coffin!

JOE. [*Starts suddenly.*] Suppose we did that?

MARY. [*Staring.*] The workhouse?

JOE. Why not, after all? That's what it will come to, sooner or later.

MARY. They'd separate us.

JOE. At least you and the kiddie'd have food.

MARY. They'd separate us. And I love you, Joe. My poor, poor Joe! I love you.

[*She nestles up to him and takes his hand.*

JOE. [*Holding her hand in his, and bending over her.*] You forgive me for returning the purse?

MARY. [*Dropping her head on his shoulder.*] Forgive you! You were right. It was the cold and the hunger maddened me. You were right!

JOE. [*Springing to his feet, with sudden passion.* MARY *staggers back.*] I *wasn't* right—I was a coward, a criminal—a vile and wicked fool.

MARY. [*Startled.*] Joe!

JOE. I had money there—money in my hand—money that you need so badly, you, the woman I love with all my ragged soul—money that would have put food into the body of my little girl—money that was mine, that belonged to me—and I've given it back, because of my rotten honesty! What right have I to

be honest? They've made a dog of me—what business had I to remember I was a man?

MARY. [*Following him and laying a hand on his arm.*] Hush, Joe—you'll wake Minnie.

JOE. [*Turning and staring haggardly at her.*] I could have got clothes—a job, perhaps—we might have left this cellar. We could have gone out to-morrow and bought things—gone into shops—we might have had food, coal——

MARY. Don't, Joe—what's the use? And who knows—it may prove a blessing to us. You told the policeman where we lived?

JOE. A blessing! I'll get up to-morrow, after having coughed out my lungs all night—and I'll go into the streets and walk there from left to right and from right to left, standing at this corner and at that, peering into men's faces, watching people go to their shops and their offices, people who are warm and comfortable—and so it will go on, till the end comes.

MARY. [*Standing very close to him, almost in a whisper.*] Why not now, Joe?

JOE. [*With a startled glance at her.*] The end?

MARY. There's no room for us in this world——

JOE. If I'd taken that money——

MARY. It's too late for that now. And I'm glad you didn't—yes, I am—I'm glad. We'll go before God clean-handed. And we'll say to Him we didn't steal, or do anything He didn't want us too. And we'll tell Him we've died because people wouldn't allow us to live.

JOE. [*With a shudder.*] No. Not that—we'll wait, Mary. Don't speak of that.

MARY. [*Wistfully.*] You've thought of it too?

JOE. Thought of it! Don't, Mary, don't! It's bad enough, in the night, when I lie there and think of to-morrow! Something will happen—it must.

MARY. What? We haven't a friend in the world.

JOE. I may meet some one I used to know.

MARY. You've met them before—they always refuse——

JOE. [*Passionately.*] I've done nothing wrong—I haven't drunk or gambled—I can't help being only a clerk, and unable to do heavy work! I can't help my lungs being weak! I've a wife and a child, like other people—and all we ask is to be allowed to live!

MARY. [*Pleading.*] Let's give it up, Joe. Go away together, you'd sleep without coughing. Sleep, that's all. And God will be kinder than men.

JOE. [*Groaning.*] Don't, Mary—don't!

MARY. Joe, I can't stand it any longer—I can't. Not only myself—but Minnie—Joe, it's too much for me! I can't stand Minnie crying, and asking me for her breakfast, as she will in the morning. Joe, dear Joe, let there be no morning!

JOE. [*Completely overcome.*] Oh, Mary, Mary!

MARY. It's not *your* fault, dear—you've done what you could. Not *your* fault they won't let you work—you've tried hard enough. And no woman ever had a better husband than you've been to me. I love you,

dear Joe. And let's do it—let's make an end. And take Minnie with us.

JOE. [*Springing up.*] Mary, I'll steal something to-morrow.

MARY. And they'd send you to prison. Besides, then God would be angry. Now we can go to Him and need not be ashamed. Let us, dear Joe—oh, do let us! I'm so tired!

JOE. No.

MARY. [*Sorrowfully.*] You won't?

JOE. [*Doggedly.*] No. We'll go to the workhouse.

MARY. You've seen them in there, haven't you?

JOE. Yes.

MARY. You've seen them standing at the window, staring at the world? And they'd take you away from me.

JOE. That's better than——

MARY. [*Firmly.*] I won't do it, Joe. I've been a good wife to you—I've been a good mother: and I love you, though I'm ragged and have pawned all my clothes; and I'll strangle myself rather than go to the workhouse and be shut away from you.

JOE. [*With a loud cry.*] No! I'll *make* them give me something; and if I *have* to kill, it shan't be my wife and child! To-morrow I'll come home with food and money—to-morrow——

[*There is a sudden wail from the child;* JOE *stops and stares at her;* MARY *goes quickly to the mattress and soothes the little girl.*

MARY. Hush, dear, hush—no, it's not morning yet,

not time for breakfast. Go to sleep again, dear. Yes, daddy's come back, and things are going to be all right now—No, dear, you can't be hungry, really—remember those beautiful cakes. Go to sleep, Minnie, dear. You're cold? [*She takes off her ragged shawl and wraps it round the child.*] There, dear, you won't be cold now. Go to sleep, Minnie——

[*The child's wail dies away, as* MARY *soothes her back to sleep.*

JOE. [*Staggering forward with a sudden cry.*] God, O God, give us bread!

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS

THE OPEN DOOR

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

SIR GEOFFREY TRANSOM

LADY TORMINSTER

THE OPEN DOOR

SCENE: *The drawing-room of* LORD TORMINSTER'S *cottage by the sea. It is* 2 *a.m. of a fine July night; the French windows are open on to the lawn. The room is dark; in an armchair,* SIR GEOFFREY TRANSOM, *a man of forty, with a frank, pleasant face, is seated, deep in thought. Suddenly the door opens, and* LADY TORMINSTER *appears and switches on the light. She starts at seeing* SIR GEOFFREY.

LADY TORMINSTER. Oh!

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Rising.*] Hullo! Don't be afraid—it's only I!

LADY TORMINSTER. What a start you gave me Why haven't you gone to bed?

SIR GEOFFREY. I'm tired of going to bed. One always has to get up again, and it becomes monotonous. Why haven't you gone to sleep?

LADY TORMINSTER. I don't know—it's too hot, or something. I've come for a book.

SIR GEOFFREY. Let me choose one for you.

[*He goes to the table.*

LADY TORMINSTER. Why were you sitting in the dark?

SIR GEOFFREY. Because the light annoyed me. What sort of book will you have? A red one or a green one?

LADY TORMINSTER. Is there a virtue in the colour of the binding?

SIR GEOFFREY. Why not? They're all the same inside. There are three hundred ways, they say, of cooking a potato—there are as many of dressing up a lie, and calling it a novel. But it's always the same old lie. Here take this. [*He hands her a book.*] Popular Astronomy. That will send you to sleep.

LADY TORMINSTER. The stars frighten me. But I'll try it. Good-night.

SIR GEOFFREY. Good-night.

LADY TORMINSTER. And you really had better go to bed.

SIR GEOFFREY. I move as an amendment that you sit down and talk.

LADY TORMINSTER. At this time of night!

SIR GEOFFREY. Why not? It's day in the Antipodes.

LADY TORMINSTER. And in this attire!

[*She glances at her peignoir.*

SIR GEOFFREY. Pooh! You are more dressed than you were at dinner. That's awfully rude, isn't it? But then, you see, you're not my hostess now—you're a spirit, walking in the night. One can't be polite to spirits. Sit down, oh shade, and let us converse.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Hesitating.*] I don't know——

SIR GEOFFREY. The household have all retired; and

we will make this concession to Mrs. Grundy—we will leave the door open. There! [*He flings it open.*] The Open Door! Centuries ago, when I was alive, I remember paragraphs with that heading.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Laughing.*] So you're not alive now?

SIR GEOFFREY. Sir Geoffrey Transom ceased to be when he said good-night to Lady Torminster. Sir Geoffrey is upstairs asleep. So is her ladyship. We are their souls. Let us talk.

LADY TORMINSTER. You are in your whimsical mood.

SIR GEOFFREY. And you in your wrapper—peignoir—tea gown—it don't matter what you call it. You look—jolly. Ridiculous word—I don't mean that at all. You look—you. More you than I've seen you for years. Sh—don't interrupt. Shades never do that. By the way, do you know that the old lumber-room, my owner—my corporeal sheath—means to go away in the morning, before you are up?

LADY TORMINSTER. Sir Geoffrey! What nonsense! You've promised to stay a month!

SIR GEOFFREY. I assure you I have been charged to invent fitting and appropriate lies to account for the ridiculous creature's abrupt departure. The man Transom is a poor liar.

LADY TORMINSTER. You are making me giddy. Would you mind putting on your body? I've not been introduced to your soul.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Springing up with a flourish.*]

How very remiss of me! Permit me. Gertrude, this is Geoffrey. You have often heard me speak of him.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Rising.*] I think I'll go to bed.

SIR GEOFFREY. Now that is preposterous. Jack, my dear old friend—the best and only friend I have in the world—is slumbering peacefully upstairs, and Jack's wife is reluctant to talk to Jack's old pal because the sun happens to be hidden on the other side of the globe. Lady Torminster, sit down. If you're good you shall have a cigarette.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Sitting.*] Well, just one. And when I've finished it, I'll go.

SIR GEOFFREY. Agreed.

[*He hands her the box; she takes a cigarette; he strikes a match and holds it for her; he then takes a cigarette himself, and lights it.*

SIR GEOFFREY. And, while smoking it, remember Penelope's web. For I've heaps of things to tell you.

LADY TORMINSTER. They'll keep till to-morrow.

SIR GEOFFREY. That's a fearful delusion. Nothing keeps. There is one law in the universe: NOW.

LADY TORMINSTER. I want to know what you mean by this nonsense about your going.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Puffing out smoke.*] Yes—I'm off in the morning. It has occurred to me that I haven't been to China. Now that is a serious omission. How can I face my forefathers, and confess to them that I haven't seen the land where the Yellow Labour comes from?

LADY TORMINSTER. China has waited a long time—a month more or less will make no difference. They are a patient race.

SIR GEOFFREY. There is gipsy blood in my veins—I must wander—I'm restless. . . . Not like Jack—he's untroubled—he can sleep. Jack's a fine sleeper, isn't he?

LADY TORMINSTER. Yes.

SIR GEOFFREY. Calm, serene, untroubled, with the conscience of a babe—one, two, three, he sleeps. He and I have had some rare times together. I've been roped to him on the Andes—he shot a tiger that was about to scrunch me—I rubbed his nose when it was frost-bitten. He saved my life—I saved his nose. I always maintain that the balance of gratitude is on his side—for where would he have been without his nose?

LADY TORMINSTER. You *are* absurd.

SIR GEOFFREY. Would you have married him without a nose?

LADY TORMINSTER. I might have.

SIR GEOFFREY. Now you know you wouldn't. You'd have been afraid of what people would say. And what would he have done when he became short-sighted, and had to wear glasses?

LADY TORMINSTER. My cigarette has gone out.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Jumping up and handing her the box.*] Take another. Never re-light a cigarette—it's like dragging up the past. Here.

LADY TORMINSTER. I said only one.

SIR GEOFFREY. This is not the hour for inflexibility. The Medes and Persians have all gone to bed.

[*She takes the cigarette; he lights it for her.*

LADY TORMINSTER. Tell me why you mean to leave us. And remember—I shan't let *this* one go out.

SIR GEOFFREY. My explanation will be handed to you with your cup of tea in the morning.

LADY TORMINSTER. And you will be gone?

SIR GEOFFREY. I shall be gone. There is a train at 7.45—which will be packed with husbands. I shall breakfast in town.

LADY TORMINSTER. Why?

SIR GEOFFREY. Well, one must breakfast somewhere. It's a convention.

LADY TORMINSTER. Sir Geoffrey, I want you to tell me what this means.

SIR GEOFFREY. Give your decision, said the judge to the arbitrator, but never your reasons. I go, because I go. Besides, has one reasons? Why do people die, or get married, or buy umbrellas? Because of typhoid, love, or the rain? Not at all. Isn't that so?

LADY TORMINSTER. I wish you'd be serious.

SIR GEOFFREY. I'm fearfully serious. When Jack shot that tiger he had to go so near the brute that he held his life in his hands. Do you know what was my chief impression as I lay there, with the ugly cat's paw upon my chest, beginning to rip me?

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Shuddering.*] Horrible! What?

SIR GEOFFREY. I resented his having eaten something that smelt like onions.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Smiling.*] A tiger!

SIR GEOFFREY. Onions may have been his undoing. That's the beggar's skin on the floor. But you should have seen me rub Jack's nose!

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Warningly.*] Sir Geoffrey, there's very little cigarette left——

SIR GEOFFREY. There are lots more in the box—and dawn is a long way off. Hang it, Lady Torminster, don't be in a hurry! Do you hear the sea out there? It's breathing as regularly as old Jack. And don't you think this is fine? Here we are, we two, meeting just as we shall meet on the other side of the Never-Never Land. It's a chance for a man to speak to a woman, and tell her things.

LADY TORMINSTER. What things!

SIR GEOFFREY. That's just it—what things? What have I to say, after all? I am going to-morrow because I am a fantastic, capricious ass. Also because I'm lonely.

LADY TORMINSTER. How will China help you?

SIR GEOFFREY. They colour it green on the map—and there *is* such a lot of it!

LADY TORMINSTER. You should get married.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*With a sudden burst of passion.*] *You* say that—you!

[*He starts back, ashamed, and hangs his head.*

LADY TORMINSTER *throws a quick glance at*

him, then looks ahead of her, puffing quietly at her cigarette.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Quietly.*] So that is why you are going?

SIR GEOFFREY. [*With a great sigh of relief.*] Now, that really is fine of you! Every other woman in the world would have seized that chance for a melodramatic exit. "Good-night, Sir Geoffrey; I must go to my husband." "Good-night, Lady Torminster." A clasp of the hand—a hot tear—mine—on your wrist. But you sit there. Splendid!

LADY TORMINSTER. I ask you again—is that truly why you are going?

SIR GEOFFREY. Well, yes, that's the fact. I apologise humbly—it's so conventional. Isn't it?

LADY TORMINSTER. I suppose it's difficult for human beings to invent new situations.

SIR GEOFFREY. You've known it, of course, all the time; you've known it ever since Jack brought me to you, the day after you were engaged. And that's nine years ago. It's the usual kind of fatality.

LADY TORMINSTER. These things happen.

SIR GEOFFREY. Yes. Well, I thought I was cured. I've been here five days, and I find I am not. So I go. That's best, isn't it?

LADY TORMINSTER. Yes.

SIR GEOFFREY. It's so infernally stupid. You're a beautiful woman, of course; but there are heaps of beautiful women. You've qualities—well, so have other women, too. I'm only forty-one—and, as you

say, why don't I marry? Simply because of you. Because you've an uncomfortable knack of intruding between me and the other lady.

LADY TORMINSTER. That is a great misfortune.

SIR GEOFFREY. It's most annoying. So I shall try China. I shall come back in two years—I shall be forty-three then—I shall come back, sound as a bell; and I shall marry some healthy, pink-cheeked young woman, take a house next to yours, and in the fulness of time your eldest son shall fall in love with my daughter.

LADY TORMINSTER. Why not?

SIR GEOFFREY. I shouldn't have told you, of course; but I'm glad that I have. It clears the air. Now what excuse shall I make?

LADY TORMINSTER. A wire from town?

SIR GEOFFREY. Jack knows all about my affairs; in fact, that's why I take the early train, to avoid his questions.

LADY TORMINSTER. You find it impossible to stay out your time here?

SIR GEOFFREY. Quite. There are moments when I am unpleasantly volcanic.

LADY TORMINSTER. Then I tell you the best thing to do. Don't take your trunks; just go up with a bag. Leave a note that you'll come back on Tuesday. Then write from town and say you're prevented.

SIR GEOFFREY. That's a good idea—yes, that's much better.

LADY TORMINSTER. And, if you find that you really cannot come back——

SIR GEOFFREY. Exactly; you'll forward my goods and chattels. And old Jack will ascribe it all to my wayward mood; he'll think I have found it too dull down here. I'm immensely obliged.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*With a smile.*] Remark that I've not offered to be a sister to you.

SIR GEOFFREY. You've been superb. Oh, the good talk we've had! Do you know, I could almost wish old Jack to have heard what I said. I'm so fond of him, that grand old fellow, that I've been on the point of telling him, myself, more than once. For you know he *will* have me take you about, and it's painful. Besides, I've felt it almost disloyal to—keep this thing from him. You understand, don't you?

LADY TORMINSTER. Yes.

SIR GEOFFREY. He and I almost are one, you see. It's not British to show any feeling, but really I—love him. And the devil comes along, and, of all women in the world, singles out Jack's wife, and fills my heart with her. That's the devil's sense of humour.

LADY TORMINSTER. Perhaps he has read Bernard Shaw. But you must never let Jack know—never.

SIR GEOFFREY. I suppose not. He's so direct, so single-minded, that the shock would be terrible. But I'm not to blame. How could I help it? Oh, all that cackle about being master of one's fate!

LADY TORMINSTER. Two years in China——

SIR GEOFFREY. We'll hope so. Of course, it didn't matter about my telling you, because you knew already.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Nodding.*] Yes, I knew. Although——

SIR GEOFFREY. Oh, you've done what you could! I've felt, in a hundred subtle ways, how you almost implored me—not to. Well, there it is. I'll write that note at once.

[*He sits at the table and begins to write.*

LADY TORMINSTER. I'm sorry you are so lonely.

SIR GEOFFREY. That's my fault, too—the fault of the ridiculous class to which we belong. I don't do anything.

LADY TORMINSTER. Why not?

SIR GEOFFREY. What would you have me do? Go into the House? Thank you, I've been there. You spend your time on the Terrace or in the smoke-room till a muffin-bell rings; then you gravely walk into the lobby, where an energetic gentleman counts you as Polyphemus counted his sheep. Philanthropy! Well, I've tried that, but it's not in my line. I'm quite a respectable landlord, but a fellow can't live all by himself in a great Elizabethan barrack. Town—the Season? Christian mothers invite you to inspect their daughters' shoulders, with a view to purchase. I'm tired of golf and polo; I'm tired of bridge. So I'll try the good sea and the open plains; sleep in a

tent and watch the stars twinkle—the stars that make you afraid.

LADY TORMINSTER. Yes, I'm afraid of the stars.

SIR GEOFFREY. Why?

LADY TORMINSTER. You remember the Persian poet? "I too have said to the stars and the wind, I will. But the wind and the stars have mocked me—they have laughed in my face. . . ."

SIR GEOFFREY. [*A little uncomfortable.*] Persian poets, like all poets, have a funny way of pretending that the stars take an interest in us. To me, it's their chief charm that they're so unconcerned. They are lonely, too.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Suddenly, violently.*] Don't say that again—don't—I can't bear it!

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Aghast.*] Gertrude!!!

LADY TORMINSTER. [*In a whisper.*] Yes.

[*He stares haggardly at her; she does not move, but looks out, through the open window, into the night.*

SIR GEOFFREY. [*With a deep breath.*] Well, I suppose we had better turn in——

LADY TORMINSTER. When do you go to China?

SIR GEOFFREY. I shall take the first boat.

LADY TORMINSTER. And you will come back——?

SIR GEOFFREY. In a year—or two—or three——

LADY TORMINSTER. We shall hear from you?

SIR GEOFFREY. [*With an effort of lightness.*] Certainly. And I will send you chests of tea—best family Souchong—and jars of ginger. Also little

boxes that fit into each other. I am afraid that is all I know at present of Chinese manufactures.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Musing.*] You will be away so long?

SIR GEOFFREY. You told me to do something. I shall learn Chinese. I believe there are five hundred letters in the alphabet.

LADY TORMINSTER. As many as that?

SIR GEOFFREY. It is possible that I exaggerate. Well, Lady Torminster, I think I'll say good-night.

[*He offers his hand, which she ignores. She smiles, and motions him back to his seat.*

LADY TORMINSTER. The sun is still shining in the antipodes, my dear Geoffrey, and you are still Jack's old friend, talking to Jack's wife. Sit down, and don't be foolish. You'll be away for years; it's possible we may never meet again. It's possible, too, that next time we do meet you may be married.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*With iron control.*] Who knows?

LADY TORMINSTER. Exactly—who knows? So there's no reason why we shouldn't look each other squarely in the face for once, and speak out what's in us.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Sorrowfully.*] Oh, Lady Torminster, what is there to say?

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Bending forward a little and smiling.*] How you resent my having told *you!*

SIR GEOFFREY. [*With a guilty start.*] Resent! I!

LADY TORMINSTER. You do, and you know it. In your heart you are saying, "All was going so well—

she has spoiled it! If she *does* love me she shouldn't have said it—Jack's wife!"

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Sturdily.*] Well—Jack's wife. Yes!

LADY TORMINSTER. Geoffrey, Jack bores me.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Aghast.*] Lady Torminster!

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Clapping her hands in glee.*] There! I've said it! Oh, it's such a relief! I never have before, and I don't suppose I ever shall again—for whom can I say it to but you? Listen—I tell you—quite *entre nous*—he bores me shockingly!

SIR GEOFFREY. [*In positive distress.*] Lady Torminster! I beg of you!

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Cheerfully.*] The best fellow in all the world, and he bores me. A heart of gold, a model husband, a perfect father—and a bore, bore, bore! There! I assure you I feel better.

SIR GEOFFREY. I suppose there are moments when every woman says that of every man.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Fanning herself.*] My dear Geoffrey, please send for your soul; it has wandered off somewhere, and I don't like talking to copy-books.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Doggedly.*] You are talking to Jack's friend.

LADY TORMINSTER. Jack's friend—and mine—don't forget that! And could I say these things about Jack to any one else, and can't you conceive what a joy it is to say them? Besides, aren't we just now on the rim of the world—aren't we a little more than

ourselves—aren't we almost on the other side of things? If we ever meet again, we shall look curiously at each other, and wonder, was it all true? As it is, I am scarcely sure that you are real. Everything is so still, so strange. Jack! He is up there, of course, the dear boy, his big red face pressed on the pillow. Oh, Geoffrey, when Jack brought you to me, and I was engaged—if you only hadn't been so loyal!

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Grimly.*] Do you know what you are saying?

LADY TORMINSTER. I am saying the things a woman says once in a lifetime, and feels all her life. Oh, it was all so simple! You loved me—you . . . were blind because of Jack . . . And I married Jack . . . I mustn't complain . . . I am one of the hundreds of women who marry—Jacks.

SIR GEOFFREY. A better, finer man never lived.

LADY TORMINSTER. I dare say—in fact, I am sure. But you should see us when we are alone, sitting there night after night, with never a word to say to each other! You tell me you're tired of polo, and golf, and bridge. Well, how about me? And need you be scowling so fiercely, and begrudge me my one little wail, you who are going away?

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Angrily.*] Yes, I am going away, and I shall marry a Chinese. I shall marry the first Chinese woman I meet.

LADY TORMINSTER. This is very sudden. Why?

SIR GEOFFREY. Because, at least, not knowing the

language, she won't be able to say unkind things about me to my friends.

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Her chin on her hand, looking squarely at him.*] Geoffrey, *is* Jack a bore?

SIR GEOFFREY. He never bores me.

LADY TORMINSTER. That's because he shot your tiger, and you rubbed his nose. Besides, you talk about horses, and so on. And yet I heard him, for a solid hour, telling you about a rubber he lost at bridge through his partner making diamonds trumps when he should have made spades.

SIR GEOFFREY. He's not clever, of course—and you are. But still! Is cleverness everything?

LADY TORMINSTER. Haven't I told you he's the very best fellow in all the world? And do you think I'm posing, pretending that I'm misunderstood, and the rest? You know me better. I am indulging, for once, in the luxury of absolute candour.

SIR GEOFEREY. You loved him——

LADY TORMINSTER. Of course I loved him—and I love him now.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Triumphantly.*] You see!

LADY TORMINSTER. If we women had had a hand in the making of the language, how many words there would be to express our feelings towards the men we are fond of! Of course I love Jack. I'm cruel to him sometimes; and there comes a look into his eyes—he has dog's eyes, you know—a faithful Newfoundland——

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Very earnestly.*] I don't think

women quite realise what friendship means to a man.

LADY TORMINSTER. I am certain that men don't realise what marriage means to a woman! Dear funeral, am I not a good wife—shall I not remain a good wife, till the end of the chapter? Because there isn't only Jack—there are Jack's children.

SIR GEOFFREY. Yes.

LADY TORMINSTER. And isn't it wonderful, when you think of it—here are we two, Jack's friend and his wife, alone on a desert island—and we have confessed our love for each other, and we are able to discuss it as calmly as though it were rheumatism!

SIR GEOFFREY. [*With a groan.*] If only I hadn't induced you to stay!

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Smiling.*] My dear friend, you didn't!

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Amazed.*] I didn't?

LADY TORMINSTER. Why no—of course not. I knew you were going to-morrow.

SIR GEOFFREY. How?

LADY TORMINSTER. Oh, never mind how! I knew. And I suspected you would be sitting up here to-night. So I came down, hoping to find you. I wanted this talk with you. And I extracted your confession—as though it had been a tooth.

SIR GEOFFREY. And why?

LADY TORMINSTER. Why? Because it will be something to think of, in the dull days ahead. Because I knew that you loved me, and wanted to be told.

Because your life lies before you, and mine is ended. Because I love you, and insisted that you should know. You leave me now, and I have no illusions. Paolo and Francesca are merely a poet's dream. You will marry—of course you will marry—but this moment, at least, has been mine.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Stretching out yearning hands.*] This moment, and every moment, in past and future!

LADY TORMINSTER. Ah, the future! Strange little syllables that hide so much! I can see you, introducing your wife to me, a little shyly—I can see myself, shaking hands with her—and with you. . . . My boy is seven already—time travels fast. . . . But it's good to know that you really have loved me, all these years. . . .

SIR GEOFFREY. By day and by night—you, and only you!

LADY TORMINSTER. And I have loved you—ah, yes, I have loved you! . . . And, having said this to each other, we will not meet again—till you bring me your wife.

SIR GEOFFREY. Ah—then!

LADY TORMINSTER. I have loved you, and I love you, for the fine, upright, loyal creature that you are. I love you for loving Jack; and it is Jack's great quality in my eyes that he has been able to inspire such love. And, my dear friend, let us not be ashamed, we two, but only very proud, and very happy. We shall go our ways, and do our duty; but we shall never forget this talk we have had to-night.

SIR GEOFFREY. [*Gently.*] I am beginning to understand. . . .

LADY TORMINSTER. You will be less lonely in future . . . and I no longer afraid of the stars. . . . Brave heart—oh, brave little heart that I for a moment have held in my hands!

SIR GEOFFREY. [*With a passionate movement towards her.*] Gertrude!

LADY TORMINSTER. [*Lifting a finger.*] No—stay where you are. . . . Those are the first rays of dawn —I must go. . . . Good-bye. We have no need to shake hands, you and I. . . . Ah, Geoffrey—good-bye!

[*She goes swiftly, and closes the door. He bends his head, and remains standing, motionless, by the table.*

CURTAIN

THE BRACELET

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HARVEY WESTERN
HIS HONOUR JUDGE BANKET
MARTIN
WILLIAM
MRS. WESTERN
MRS. BANKET
MISS FARREN
SMITHERS

TIME—*The present*

Produced at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre on Feb. 26, 1912

THE BRACELET

The dining-room in an upper middle-class house near the Park. It is furnished in the conventional modern style, soberly and without imagination The room is on the ground floor, facing the street, the door is to the right, and leads into the hall To the left of this door is a sideboard, glittering with silver. Three tall windows, at the back heavily curtained; between them hang two or three family portraits. The table, on which there is the usual débris of a meal that is over—coffee-cups, liqueur-glasses, etc.—has been laid for four persons, and their four chairs are still around it. The fireplace, with its rather crude and ambitious mantelpiece, is in the centre of the left wall; and uncomfortable-looking heavy armchairs are on each side of it. On the mantelpiece are a marble clock and a few bits of china. In the angle formed at the left side is a small Queen Anne writing-table, open. To the right of the room is a large sofa. The floor is heavily carpeted, and there are many rugs scattered about.

When the curtain rises, the room is in darkness. WILLIAM, *the footman, enters hurriedly and switches on the electric light. He rushes to the table, looks eagerly around, shifting cups and glasses, napkins, etc., then goes on his hands and knees and searches on the carpet. After a moment,* SMITHERS, *the lady's-maid, follows him.*

SMITHERS. [*Eagerly.*] Can't you find it?

WILLIAM. [*Sulkily.*] No. Not yet. Give me time.

SMITHERS. [*Feeling along the table-cloth.*] Under one of those rugs, perhaps.

WILLIAM. Well, I'm looking. [*Motor-horn sounds sharply, off.*] All right, all right!

SMITHERS. [*With a jerk of the head.*] Missis is telling him to do it.

WILLIAM. [*On all fours, crawling about.*] Very like her voice, too, when she's angry. Drat the thing! Where can it be?

[*He peers into the coal scuttle.*

SMITHERS. No good looking in there, stupid.

WILLIAM. They always say it's the unlikeliest places——

[MARTIN, *the butler, comes in.*

MARTIN. Come, come, haven't you found it?

WILLIAM. No, Mr. Martin. It ain't here.

MARTIN. [*Bustling about.*] Must be, must be. She says——

WILLIAM. I can't help what she says. It ain't.

MARTIN. [*Looking under the sofa.*] Just you hustle, young man, and don't give me any back-answers.

[*Having completed his examination of the sofa, he moves to the sideboard, and fusses round that.*

SMITHERS. [*Methodically shaking out each napkin.*] I tell you she's cross.

MARTIN. [*Hard at work, searching.*] Doesn't mind disturbing *us*, in the midst of our supper!

WILLIAM. [*Who, all the time, has been on all fours searching.*] We're dirt, that's what we are—dirt.

MARTIN. [*Reprovingly.*] William, I've told you before——

WILLIAM. Very sorry, Mr. Martin, but this is the first time I've accepted an engagement at a stock-broker's. [*He has been crawling round the curtains at the back, shaking them; pulling hard at one of them he dislodges the lower part.*] Lor! *Now* I've done it!

SMITHERS. Clumsy!

MARTIN. [*Severely.*] That comes of too much talk. Never mind the curtain—go on looking.

[WILLIAM *drops on to his hands and knees again;* HARVEY WESTERN *comes into the room, perturbed and restless. He is a well-preserved man of fifty.*

HARVEY. I say—not found it?

MARTIN. Not yet, sir.

HARVEY. Nuisance. *Must* be here, you know.

MARTIN. Is it a very valuable one, sir?

HARVEY. [*Who has gone to the table, and is turning things over.*] No, no, not particularly—but that's not the point. [*He looks under the table.*

MARTIN. [*Still seeking.*] When did madam find that she'd lost it, sir?

HARVEY. Oh, about five minutes after we'd started. And we've turned over everything in the car. It's certainly not there. [*He fusses around the table.*

MARTIN. Is madam quite sure she was wearing it, sir?

SMITHERS. [*Fretfully.*] Yes, yes, of course she was wearing it. I put it on her myself.

MARTIN. Where did madam put her cloak on, sir?

SMITHERS. In here. I brought it in.

MARTIN. You didn't notice whether——

SMITHERS. No. Don't you think if we moved *all* the rugs——

[*She moves across the room and joins* WILLIAM, *who is still grovelling on the floor, and goes on her knees by his side.*

HARVEY. It must be here *somewhere.*

[*They are all searching furiously*—WILLIAM *by the windows, peering into the spaces between the wall and the carpets,* MARTIN *at the sideboard,* SMITHERS *gathering the rugs together, all on their hands and*

knees, while HARVEY, *bent double, is looking under the table.* MRS. WESTERN *comes in stonily, followed by the* JUDGE *and* MRS. BANKET. MRS. WESTERN *is a handsome woman of forty-five, with a rather stern, cold face; the* JUDGE, *a somewhat corpulent, genial man of fifty-five; and his wife, an amiable nullity, seven or eight years younger. They are all in evening-dress, the ladies in opera-cloaks.*

MRS. WESTERN. [*Pausing on the threshold.*] Well!

HARVEY. [*Rising and dusting himself.*] No trace of it.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Looking around.*] A nice mess you've made of the room!

MARTIN. You told us to look, Madam.

JUDGE. [*Going to the fire and standing with his back to it.*] I'm afraid we'll be shockingly late, Alice.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Firmly.*] I don't go without my bracelet.

[*She goes to the table, and proceeds to shift the cups and glasses.*

MRS. BANKET. [*Moving to the other side of the table, and doing the same.*] Quite right, dear—I wouldn't.

[*They all search, except the* JUDGE, *who shrugs his shoulders placidly, then takes a cigarette from his case, and lights it. The three servants still are grovelling on the floor.*

MRS. WESTERN. I *know* I had it while I was drinking my coffee——

JUDGE. My experience is, one should never look for things. They find themselves.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Shortly.*] Nonsense.

JUDGE. A fact. Or at least one should *pretend* to be looking for something else. My glasses now. When I lose them I declare loudly I can't find my cigar-case. That disheartens the glasses—they return at once.

MRS. BANKET. [*Reproachfully.*] Don't be so irritating, Tom!

JUDGE. That's all very well, but how about me? I was asked here to dine. I've dined—I'm not complaining about the dinner. But now the curtain's up—and here am I watching half-a-dozen people looking very hard for a thing that isn't there.

MRS. BANKET. Tom, Tom, it's those laughs you get in Court that make you so fond of talking. Don't you see how you're vexing your sister?

MRS. WESTERN. Oh, I'm used to Tom. Harvey, I think you might be looking.

HARVEY. My dear, I've been turning round and round in this corner like a bird in a cage.

MARTIN. [*Who all this time, like the other servants, has been crawling around the different articles of furniture in the room, suddenly rises to his feet and addresses his mistress firmly but respectfully.*] It's not here, madam.

[*The other servants also rise: and stand, each in their corner.*

JUDGE. That, I imagine, is perfectly clear; and I congratulate the witness on the manner in which he has given his evidence. [*He throws his cigarette into the fire and steps forward.*] Now, my dear Alice——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Sitting doggedly in the chair in front of the table and proceeding to pull off her gloves.* I don't go without my bracelet.

JUDGE. Heaven forbid that I should speak slightingly of a gift of Harvey's—but really it isn't of such priceless value.

MRS. WESTERN. That has nothing to do with it.

MRS. BANKET. Of course not. Oh, these men!

HARVEY. [*Stepping forward.*] Tom's right. Let's go. Look here, I'll get you another.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Drily.*] Thanks—I want *that* one. —Smithers, and you, William, just look again in the hall.

SMITHERS. Yes, m'm.

MRS. WESTERN. And then help the chauffeur—turn out *everything* in the car.

SMITHERS. Yes, m'm.

MRS. WESTERN. Bring the rugs into the house, and shake them.

SMITHERS. Yes, m'm. [*She and* WILLIAM *go.*

JUDGE. [*Going back to the fire.*] Sumptuary laws—that's what we want. If women didn't wear bracelets, they couldn't lose them.

MRS. WESTERN. Martin, William is honest, isn't he?

HARVEY. [*Protesting.*] Oh, hang it, Alice!

MARTIN. Quite, madam—excellent character—a little flighty, but a most respectable young man.

MRS. WESTERN. I've seen him reading a sporting paper.

JUDGE. A weakness, my dear Alice, common to the

best of us. I do it myself sometimes, but I'm willing to be searched.

MRS. BANKET. O Tom, *do* be quiet!

MRS. WESTERN. [*To the* JUDGE.] You're very unsympathetic. [*Turning to* MARTIN *again.*] None of the other servants came in after we left?

MARTIN. No, madam.

MRS. WESTERN. You're sure?

MARTIN. Quite sure, madam. They were all downstairs, having their supper.

MRS. WESTERN. Most mysterious! Incomprehensible!

JUDGE. [*Looking at his watch.*] Past nine! We shall plunge into the play—like body-snatchers, looking for the corpse of the plot—and we shall never know what it was that the heroine did.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Ignoring him, to* MARTIN.] Smithers I'll answer for.

MARTIN. Oh yes, madam. If I *might* make a suggestion——

MRS. WESTERN. Well?

MARTIN. It couldn't have fallen anywhere into your dress, madam?

MRS. WESTERN. Nonsense, how could it? [*She gets up and shakes herself.*] Absurd. [*She sits again.*

MARTIN. Into your cloak?

MRS. WESTERN. Silk! No. That'll do, Martin. You might help the others outside. [MARTIN *goes.*

JUDGE. [*With a step forward.*] Now, admirable sister——

MRS. WESTERN. Didn't it strike you that Martin's manner was rather strange?

HARVEY. [*Fretfully.*] Really you *must* not suspect the servants!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Turning to him.*] *Must* not—must! That's scarcely the way to speak to me, Harvey.

HARVEY. [*Deprecatingly.*] My dear——

MRS. WESTERN. And I wasn't suspecting—I was merely asking a question of my brother.

JUDGE. Come, Alice, let's go.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Shaking her head.*] You three go. You'll excuse me.

JUDGE. [*Cheerfully.*] If you insist——

MRS. BANKET. [*Coming forword.*] No, no. *Do* come, Alice!

MRS. WESTERN. I can't—I'm so puzzled. [*With a sudden idea.*] Oh!

HARVEY. [*Who is behind her to the left, between her and the* JUDGE.] What? Have you found it?

MRS. WESTERN. No, no—of course not. But ring, please, will you?

HARVEY. Why?

MRS. WESTERN. I want you to ring. [*He presses the bell by the fireplace.*] I just remember Miss Farren came in while we were having coffee.

HARVEY. [*Indignantly.*] Alice!

MRS. WESTERN. I asked her to write a card to Harrod's—she'll have written it in here.

HARVEY. [*Angrily.*] I say—really!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Coldly.*] No need to snub me again—before our guests! I need scarcely say I am not *suspecting* Miss Farren—but in justice to her——

MRS. BANKET. But, Alice, she'll have gone out—you told her she might——

MRS. WESTERN. Only to her sister's close by—and she may not have gone yet. Why don't they answer the bell? Ring again, Harvey.

JUDGE. The poor things are still searching.

HARVEY. [*Firmly.*] Alice, I protest, I do indeed——

MRS. WESTERN. Don't be so foolishly sentimental—it's ridiculous at your age. The young woman is in my employ, as governess to my children. [MARTIN *comes in.*] Has Miss Farren gone out yet?

MARTIN. No, madam. I believe she's in her room, dressing.

MRS. WESTERN. Ask her to come.

MARTIN. Yes, madam. [*He goes.*

JUDGE. [*Shaking his head.*] No sense of proportion, that's the truth—they've no sense of proportion.

MRS. BANKET. Tom!

JUDGE. A fact, my dear—but you can't help it. You've every quality in the world but just that—you *will* always look through the wrong end of the telescope.

MRS. BANKET. Really, Tom, this isn't the moment for your nonsense—and if you only knew how stupid you are when you try to be funny!

HARVEY. [*Going nervously to* MRS. WESTERN.] I say, I really do think——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Roughly.*] I don't care *what* you think. Leave me alone!

[*There is silence. The* JUDGE, *sitting by the fire, whistles loudly "Waltz me around again, Willie!"* HARVEY *has gone moodily across the room and stands by the sideboard.* MRS. BANKET *is sitting behind the table. After a moment the door opens, and* MISS FARREN *comes in, with hat and cloak on, and goes straight to* MRS. WESTERN. *She is an extremely pretty girl of twenty.*

MISS FARREN. You want me, Mrs. Western?

MRS. WESTERN. Oh, Miss Farren, I've lost my bracelet.

MISS FARREN. Really! I'm so sorry! Where?

MRS. WESTERN. I don't know. You didn't see it, of course, after we'd gone?

MISS FARREN. [*Shaking her head.*] No—and no one came in. I was writing the letter to Harrod's.

MRS. WESTERN. No one at all?

MISS FARREN. No—I'm sure of that. And I'd hardly got to my room when I heard the car come back.

MRS. WESTERN. Well, thank you, Miss Farren.

MISS FARREN. It's very annoying. You're sure it's not in the car?

JUDGE. My dear Miss Farren, it's not in the car, it's not anywhere, and I'm beginning to believe it

never was at all. Come, Alice, let's go. We shan't see much of the play, but we can at least help the British drama by buying two programmes.

MISS FARREN. [*With a light laugh—then turning to* MRS. WESTERN *again.*] Do you want me any more, Mrs. Western?

MRS. WESTERN. No, thanks. [MISS FARREN *turns to go*—MRS. WESTERN, *who has suddenly cast an eager glance at her, as though attracted by something, calls her back.*] Oh, Miss Farren!

MISS FARREN. [*Turning.*] Yes?

MRS. WESTERN. I wonder whether you'd be so good as to shift this aigrette of mine—it's hurting me.

MISS FARREN. Certainly.

[*She comes back to* MRS. WESTERN, *and stands by her side; as she raises her arm* MRS. WESTERN *jumps up and seizes it by the wrist.*

MRS. WESTERN. My bracelet!

[*Keeping a tight hold of* MISS FARREN'S *wrist, she holds it at arm's length. There is a general cry of amazement—the* JUDGE *and his wife start to their feet*—HARVEY *rushes eagerly towards her.*

JUDGE. Alice!

MRS. BANKET. Oh!

HARVEY. No, no——

[*These three exclamations are simultaneous.*

MRS. WESTERN. There it is! She took it!

JUDGE. Are you sure?

HARVEY. [*Breathless and urgent.*] Alice——

MISS FARREN. [*Recovering from her shock and bewilderment.*] Mrs. Western, it isn't——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Sternly, still holding the girl by the wrist.*] You dare to pretend——

HARVEY. [*Who is now at the back of his wife's chair, looking closely at the bracelet.*] Let me look, let me look. . . . I say, Alice, you're wrong. It's not yours at all. The setting's different.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Angrily.*] What do you mean, different? You think I don't know my own bracelet? Are you mad? I say it's mine—and it is!

JUDGE. [*Stepping forward.*] Alice, be careful——

MRS. WESTERN. Careful! You're as bad as he! Of course the thing's mine—I've been wearing it for weeks—and you think I can make a mistake? She found it, and took it.

MISS FARREN. [*Very distressed.*] No, no, Mrs. Western, really! It isn't yours! I assure you!

HARVEY. Alice, I declare to you——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Roughly.*] Be quiet and go away. This is no business of yours.

HARVEY. [*Eagerly.*] But it is! It was I who bought the wretched thing—well, I am prepared to swear that this isn't the one!

MRS. WESTERN. [*A little shaken, looking at it again.*] You're prepared to. . . . [*She lifts her head.*] How can you talk such utter nonsense? There is not the least doubt—not the least!

JUDGE. [*Stopping* HARVEY, *who is about to protest violently.*] Alice, mind what you're saying. You'll get yourself into trouble. If Harvey says——

MRS. BANKET. [*Contemptuously.*] He's saying it to shield her, that's all.

HARVEY. [*Indignantly.*] I'm not. It's not true. But you mustn't bring such an accusation. It's monstrous. And I won't allow——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Drawing herself up.*] You—won't—allow! The girl takes my bracelet—and you won't allow!

MISS FARREN. [*Trying to free herself.*] Mrs. Western, I haven't, I haven't!

JUDGE. [*Impressively.*] Alice, will you listen to me?

MRS. WESTERN. No, I won't! This doesn't concern you, or any one, but me and this girl! Look at her—she knows!

MISS FARREN. Mrs. Western, you're hurting my arm. . . .

MRS. WESTERN. Come now—confess! I won't be hard on you if you confess——

[*She wrenches off the bracelet, and releases the girl, who staggers back, nursing her wrist.*

HARVEY. [*Almost beside himself, stamping his foot.*] Alice, Alice, will you hear——

MISS FARREN. Oh, you *have* hurt me! And you've no right—to say such things. . . .

HARVEY. No, you haven't, you haven't!

MRS. WESTERN. Besides, a bracelet like that! [*She*

holds it up. To MISS FARREN.] You won't confess? Very well, then. I'll send for a policeman.

HARVEY. [*Doggedly.*] The bracelet is hers.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Jeeringly.*] Turquoise and emeralds! Hers! A coincidence, perhaps. Very likely. I'll give her in charge at once.

HARVEY. The bracelet is hers, I tell you.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Turning furiously on him.*] You dare to say that?

HARVEY. [*Steadily.*] Yes. Because I myself—gave it to her.

[*There is a moment's almost stupefied silence;* HARVEY *and* ALICE *are face to face.* MISS FARREN *to the left of her,* MRS. BANKET *is still at the back, the* JUDGE *by the fire.* MRS. WESTERN *breaks the silence.*

MRS. WESTERN. [*Sternly.*] You—gave—it—her?

HARVEY. [*Steadily.*] Yes.

MRS. WESTERN. You ask me to believe that you gave a bracelet to—this person—my children's governess?

HARVEY. I did.

MRS. WESTERN. An exact copy of the one you gave me?

HARVEY. I've told you—it's not an exact copy—there's a difference in the setting.

MRS. BANKET. Nonsense, nonsense, it can't be—he's just saying this——

JUDGE. Fanny, don't interfere.

HARVEY. I'm saying what's true.

MRS. WESTERN. I refuse to believe it. It's incredible. You've not sunk so low as that. It's a lie.

HARVEY. [*Indignantly.*] Alice!

MRS. WESTERN. Yes, a lie. A trumped-up story. The girl has taken it——

MISS FARREN. I have not!

MRS. WESTERN. You can tell that to the magistrate—[*She turns to* HARVEY] and you too, if you like. [*She moves to the bell.*

JUDGE. [*Putting out a hand to stop her.*] Alice——

MRS. WESTERN. Leave me alone, Tom. I know what I'm doing. I'll send for a policeman.

HARVEY. [*Imploringly.*] Alice, Alice——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Pausing, with her hand on the bell.*] I'll let the girl off, if you'll tell me the truth.

HARVEY. I *have* told you the truth.

MRS. WESTERN. You persist in this silly falsehood?

HARVEY. It isn't—I tell you it isn't!

MRS. WESTERN. Very well, then.

[*She presses the bell. At that moment the door bursts open, and* MARTIN *comes in triumphantly, with the bracelet on a salver.* SMITHERS *and* WILLIAM *are behind him, but do not pass beyond the threshold.*

MARTIN. [*Eagerly.*] Ma'am, ma'am, we've found the——

[MRS. WESTERN *has turned towards him, still holding the other bracelet in her hand*

MARTIN *catches sight of it, and stops dead short, staring bewilderedly at it.*

MRS. WESTERN. [*Calmly.*] Where did you find it?

[*She takes the bracelet off the salver and lays it on the table.*

MARTIN. [*With a great effort.*] It had fallen into the pocket of the car—there was a hole in the pocket—it had worked its way right down into the body.

MRS. WESTERN. Very well. Thank you.

[MARTIN *goes; the other servants have already slunk off. There is a moment's silence.* MRS. WESTERN *suddenly flings the bracelet she has in her hand in* MISS FARREN'S *direction.*

MRS. WESTERN. [*Contemptuously.*] Here. I return you your property. And now pack up your things and leave the house.

HARVEY. [*Who has stepped forward and picked up the bracelet, standing between* MRS. WESTERN *and* MISS FARREN.] No.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Staring at him.*] What?

HARVEY. [*Violently.*] I say, No!

MRS. WESTERN. I have told the girl to leave my house.

HARVEY. *My* house—mine! And she shall stay in it! Or, at least, when she goes, it shall be without the slightest stain or suspicion——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Scornfully.*] I am not accusing her of theft.

HARVEY. But you are insinuating—I declare solemnly before you all——

JUDGE. [*Interposing.*] Harvey, one moment. . . . I am sure that Miss Farren would rather go to her room. . . .

MISS FARREN. Yes.

HARVEY. By all means. Here, take your bracelet. [*He gives it to her.*] But you don't leave this house—you understand that? *I* am master here.

[MISS FARREN *goes quietly.*

JUDGE. Now just listen to me, both of you. Be calm—all this excitement won't help. Harvey, you too. You and Alice will have your explanation——

MRS. WESTERN. If the girl doesn't go to-night——

HARVEY. I tell you again she shall not! And there's no need. I was a fool to give her that bracelet—she didn't want to take it——

MRS. BANKET. Why *did* you?

HARVEY. I had given Alice one on her birthday.

MRS. WESTERN. Well?

HARVEY. And so I got *her* one.

MRS. WESTERN. Why?

HARVEY. Because—— [*He stops, very embarrassed.*]

MRS. WESTERN. Well?

HARVEY. Because—oh, because—well, she admired it—and *she* liked pretty things too. . . .

MRS. WESTERN. I don't think you need say anything more.

MRS. BANKET. No. He needn't. It's clear enough!

HARVEY. [*Eagerly.*] Look here, on my honour—I

am fond of her, of course, in a way—but I'm old enough to be her father—and I swear to you all—I've seen her about, of course, a good deal—and I gave her that thing—but beyond that, nothing, nothing!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Sitting, and with a shrug of the shoulder.*] A ridiculous fairy tale!

JUDGE. My dear Alice, take my advice, and believe your husband.

MRS. WESTERN. You too!

MRS. BANKET. All alike, when there's a pretty face!

JUDGE. Let her find another situation, by all means. . . . But to turn a girl out, at a moment's notice! You couldn't.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Turning to the* JUDGE.] You are really suggesting that I should sleep under the same roof with——

JUDGE. [*Almost sternly.*] You are condemning, without the slightest evidence. And condemning, remember, an utterly defenceless creature. This girl has a claim on you: were your suspicions justified, she would *still* have a claim.

MRS. WESTERN. Indeed!

MRS. BANKET. The nonsense he talks! It's really too silly!

JUDGE. You are extraordinary, you women! You exact such rigid morality from the governess and the housemaid! You're full of excuses when it's one of yourselves!

MRS. BANKET. [*Indignantly.*] Tom!

JUDGE. Well, that's true—we all know it! And here—I believe every word Harvey has said.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Scarcely believing her ears.*] You do!

JUDGE. Because he is a man of honour, and men of honour have their code. Their children's governess . . . is safe. You will do well to believe it, too. Now, Fanny, we'll go. Be sensible, Alice—I tell you again, Harvey's right; the girl must not be—summarily dismissed: it would be an act of cruel injustice. Good-bye. [*He offers to kiss her—she turns away.*] As you like. Good-bye, Harvey, old man.

HARVEY. Good-bye, Tom. [*They shake hands.*] And thank you.

MRS. BANKET. [*Kissing* MRS. WESTERN.] My poor, dear Alice!

MRS. WESTERN. Good-bye, Fanny. I'm sorry that our party to-night——

MRS. BANKET. Oh, that doesn't matter! Poor thing! I promise you that Tom shall have a good talking to!

[*She is too angry with* HARVEY *to say good-bye to him: she and the* JUDGE *go. The moment the door closes,* HARVEY *begins, feverishly and passionately.*

HARVEY. Now just listen. I'm going to speak to you—I'm going to say things—things that have been in my heart, in my life, for years. I'm not going to

spare you. I'm going to tell you the truth, and the truth, and the truth!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Calmly, looking ironically at him.*] If it's the same kind of truth you've been giving us to-night——

HARVEY. We've been married ten years. Oh, I know, we were neither of us very young. But anyhow the last five have been nothing but misery for me. Misery—do you hear that? You sitting there, calm and collected—not caring one damn for me——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Quietly.*] That's not true.

HARVEY. It is, and you know it. The mother of my children! Satisfied with that. Never a word of kindness, or sympathy. And as for—affection!

MRS. WESTERN. We're not sweethearts—we're middle-aged people.

HARVEY. Well, I need something more. And, look here, I'll tell you. This girl has made life worth living. That's all. I'd come home at night dog-tired, all day in the City—sick of it, Stock Exchange, office, and the mud and the grime and the worry—there were you, with a nod, ah, Harvey, good evening—and you'd scarcely look up from your Committee Report or your Blue-book, or damned pamphlet or other——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Contemptuously.*] You are one of the men who want their wife to be a mere sort of doll.

HARVEY. [*More and more vehemently.*] I want my wife to care for me! I want her to smile when I

come in, and be glad—I want her to love me! You don't! By the Lord, I've sneaked upstairs, gone in and had a peep at the children—well, they'd be asleep. I tell you I've been hungry, hungry, for a word, for a look! And there, in the schoolroom, was this girl. I've played it low down, I know—she's fond of me. But I couldn't help it—I was lonely—that's what it was. I've gone up there night after night. *You* didn't know where I was—and you didn't care. In my study, you thought—the cold, chilly box that you call my study—glad to have me out of the way. Well, there I was, with this girl. It was something to look forward to, in the cab, coming home. It was something to catch hold of, when things went wrong, in that dreary grind of money-making. Her eyes lit up when they saw me. She'd ask me about things—if I coughed, she'd fuss me—she had pretty ways, and was pleased, oh, pleased beyond words, if I brought her home something——

MRS. WESTERN. So this isn't the first time!

HARVEY. [*With a snarl.*] No, of course not! She admired that bracelet of yours—by Jove, I said to myself, I'll get her one like it! Whatever I brought home to *you* you'd scarcely say thank you—and usually it went into the drawer—I'd such shocking bad taste! *She'd* beam! Well, as ill-luck would have it, you took a fancy to this one. I told her she mustn't wear hers——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Calmly and cuttingly.*] Conspiring behind my back.

HARVEY. [*Raging.*] Oh, if you knew what has gone on behind your back! Not when I was with her—when I was alone! The things I've said about you—to myself! When I thought of this miserable life that had to be dragged on here, thought of your superior smile, your damnable cruelty——

MRS. WESTERN. [*Genuinely surprised.*] Cruelty! Why?

HARVEY. What else? I'd go up to you timidly—bah, why talk of it? To you I've been the machine that made money—money to pay for the house, and the car, and the dressmakers' bills—a machine that had to be fed—and when you'd done that, you'd done all. Well, there was this girl——

MRS. WESTERN. You had your children.

HARVEY. A boy of seven and a girl of five—in bed when I came home—and *your* children much more than mine—I'm a stranger to them! And anyhow, I wanted something more—something human, alive—that only a woman can give. And she gave it. Nothing between us, I swear—but just that. As Tom says, I've not been such a cur—and *you* ought to know me well enough, after all these years! . . . But there is the truth—she's fond of me: she is, it's a fact. And I *needed* that fondness—it has kept me going. And now—do you think I'll let her be thrust out into the street?

[*As he says these last words he drops into a chair, facing her, and looks fiercely and doggedly at her.*

MRS. WESTERN. [*Calmly.*] Stop now, and listen to me. I've let you rattle on. Will you hear me for one moment?

HARVEY. Go on.

MRS. WESTERN. All those things you've said about me—[*With a shrug.*] Well, what's the use? I suppose we're like most married people when they come to our age. I've interests of my own, that don't appeal to you——

HARVEY. Blue-books and Committees!

MRS. WESTERN. I do useful work—oh yes, you may sneer—you always have sneered! If a woman tries to do something sensible with her life, instead of cuddling and kissing you all day, she's cold and cruel. We've drifted apart—well, your fault as much as mine. More, perhaps—but it's no good going into that—no good making reproaches. That's how things are—we must make the best of them. Wait, let me finish. About this girl. Granted that what you say is true—and I'm inclined to believe it——

HARVEY. [*Genuinely grateful.*] At least thank you for that!

MRS. WESTERN. Or at any rate it's better policy to believe it, for every one's sake——

HARVEY. [*Bitterly.*] That's right—that's more like you!

MRS. WESTERN. We gain nothing by abusing each other. And I didn't interrupt *you*. Let's look facts in the face. Here we are, we two—tied.

HARVEY. [*With a groan.*] Yes.

MRS. WESTERN. With our two children. If it weren't for them. . . . Well, we've *got* to remain together. Now there's this girl. It's quite evident, after what you've said, that she can't stop here——

HARVEY. [*Jumping to his feet.*] She shall!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Fretfully.*] Oh, do be a man, and drop this mawkish sentiment! You say she's fond of you—you've *made* her fond of you. Was this a very pretty thing—for a man of your age to do?

HARVEY. [*Sullenly, as he drops back into his chair.*] Never mind my age.

MRS. WESTERN. Very well then—for a married man?

HARVEY. An unhappy man.

MRS. WESTERN. Even granting that—though if you're unhappy it's your own fault—I've always been urging you to go on the County Council—What's to become of the girl, if she stops here?

HARVEY. [*Desperately.*] I don't know—but I can't let her go—I tell you I can't!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Scarcely able to conceal her disgust.*] Oh, if you knew how painful it is to hear you whining like this! It's pitiable, really! In the girl's own interest—how can she stop?

HARVEY. She must. I can't let her be turned out. It would break her heart.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Turning right round, and staring at him.*] What?

HARVEY. [*Doggedly.*] Yes—it would. She's very

fond of me, that's the truth. I know that I've been to blame—but it's too late for that now. She's romantic, of course—what you'd call sentimental. I dare say I've played on her feelings—she saw I was lonely. She has a side that you've never suspected—a tender, sensitive side—she has ideals. . . . Well, do you realise what it would mean, with a girl like that? No one knows her as I do. I'm quite startled sometimes, to find how fond she is of me. Oh, have some sympathy! It's difficult, I know—it's terribly difficult. But she loves me—that's the truth—and a young girl's love—why, she might throw herself into the river! Oh yes, you smile—but she might! What do *you* know of life, with your Blue-books? Anyhow, I daren't risk it. By-and-by—there's no hurry, is there? And I put it to you—be merciful! You're not the ordinary woman—you have a brain—you're not conventional. Don't act like the others. Don't drive this girl out of the house. It would end in tragedy. Believe it!

MRS. WESTERN. You can't really expect me to keep a girl here, as governess to my children, who, as you say, is in love with you.

HARVEY. [*Pleading.*] I expect you—I'm asking you—to help her—and me.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Shaking her head.*] That's too much. We won't turn her out to-night—I'll give her a reference, and all that——

HARVEY. [*Springing to his feet again.*] Alice, I can't let her go!

MRS. WESTERN. [*Conciliatorily.*] Ask Tom, ask any one——

HARVEY. [*More and more passionately.*] I tell you, I can't let her go!

MRS. WESTERN. Be sensible, Harvey—you must realise yourself there's no alternative——

HARVEY. [*With a violent and uncontrollable outburst.*] I vow and declare to you—if she goes, I go too! And the consequences will be on your head!

[MRS. WESTERN *has also risen—they stand face to face, looking at each other—and for a moment there is silence. The door opens, and* MISS FARREN *comes in, dressed as before. She walks straight to* MRS. WESTERN.

MISS FARREN. Mrs. Western, my things are packed, and on the cab——

HARVEY. [*Wildly.*] My poor child, you're *not* to go —I told you!

MISS FARREN. [*With a demure glance at him, stopping him as he is moving towards her.*] Of course I must —I can't stay here—that's not possible. My sister will take me in for to-night.

MRS. WESTERN. Miss Farren, my husband has explained to me—I withdraw all——

MISS FARREN. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, that's all right—though thank you all the same. And it really doesn't matter much. I was going to give notice to-morrow anyway——

HARVEY. [*Starting violently.*] What!

MISS FARREN. Well, I put it off as long as I could, Mr. Western, because . . . But the fact is I'm going on the stage—musical comedy——

HARVEY. [*Breathless, staggering back.*] You—are—going-——

MISS FARREN. I've accepted an engagement—oh, I'm only to be a show-girl at first—but they believe I'll do well. They've been wanting me some time. And my *fiancé* has persuaded me.

HARVEY. [*Collapsing utterly, dropping into the chair by the fire.*] Your——

MISS FARREN. [*Gravely.*] My *fiancé*—yes. He's one of the comic men there.

MRS. WESTERN. [*Who has been watching them both with an unmoved face.*] I'll write a cheque for your salary, Miss Farren.

[*She goes to the desk at back.*

MISS FARREN. [*Coquettishly, to* HARVEY.] I ought to have told you, I know, Mr. Western. But it *was* so dull here—and you've been most awfully good to me. I can never be sufficiently grateful.

HARVEY. [*With difficulty, his face turned away.*] Don't mention it. And I hope you'll be happy.

MISS FARREN. [*Lightly.*] Thank you. I mean to try!

[MRS. WESTERN *returns with a cheque which she hands to* MISS FARREN.

MRS. WESTERN. Here, Miss Farren.

MISS FARREN. [*Putting it into her bag.*] Thank you so much. Good-bye.

MRS. WESTERN. If you should ever need a reference, don't be afraid to——

MISS FARREN. Oh, thanks, no more governessing for me. Good-bye!

[*She trips out, without another glance at* HARVEY, *who sits huddled by the fire.* MRS. WESTERN *moves slowly to the door. At the threshold she pauses, turns, and looks at* HARVEY.

MRS. WESTERN. I'll take care that the next governess—shall be quite as pretty as this one, Harvey.

[*She opens the door and goes.* HARVEY *doesn't stir.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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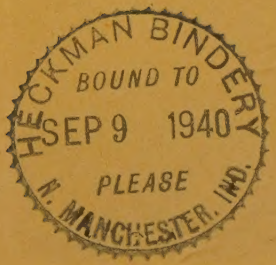
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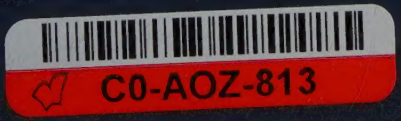
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